The UNESCO COURIER

DECEMBER 1990

the enigma of beauty

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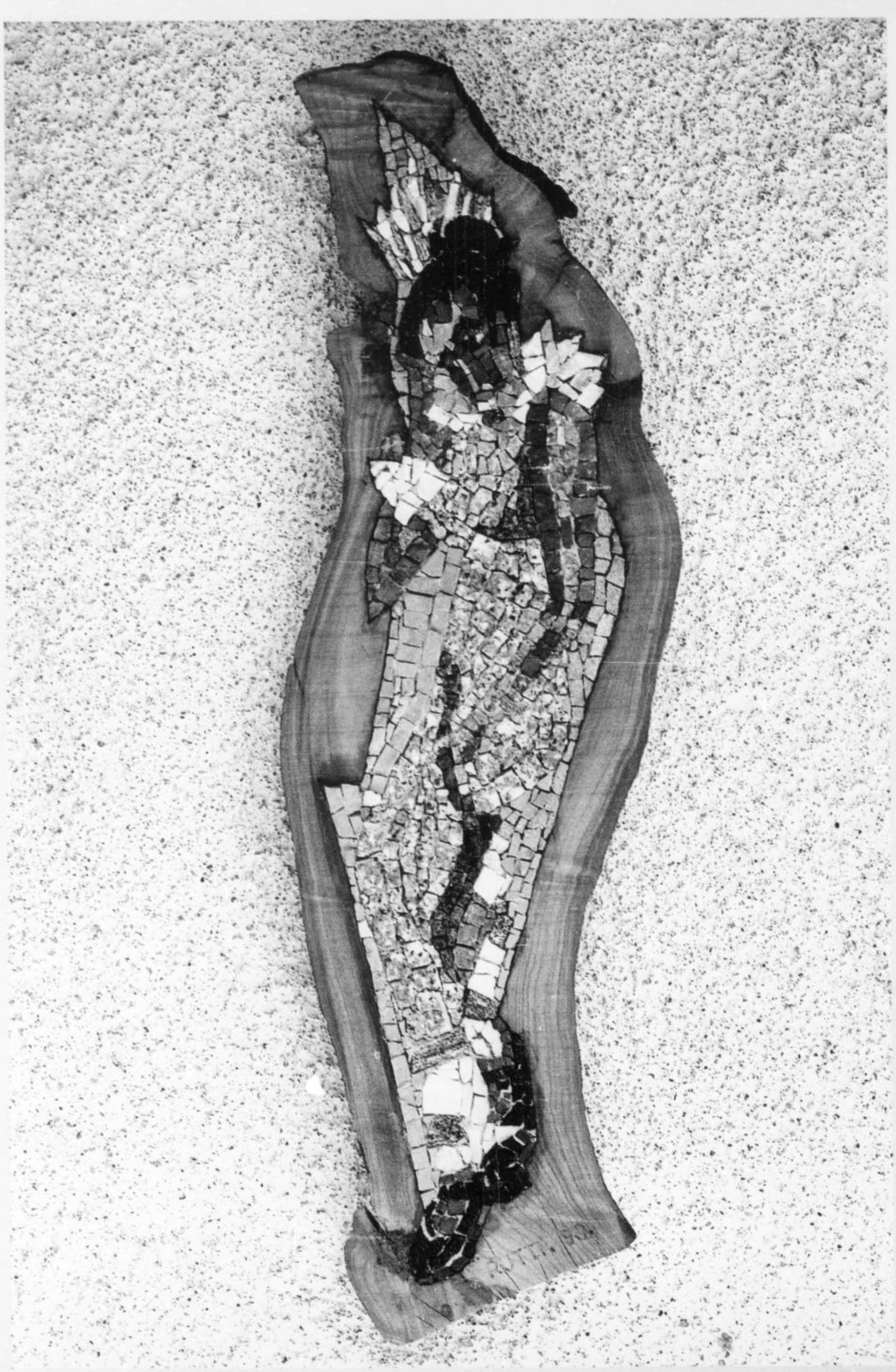
encounters

We invite readers to send us photographs to be considered for publication in this feature. Your photo should show a painting, a sculpture, piece of architecture or any other subject which seems to be an example of cross-fertilization between cultures. Alternatively, you could send us pictures of two works from different cultural backgrounds in which you see some striking connection or resemblance. Please add a short caption to all photographs.



FLAMENCO

1990, natural stone mosaic on cherry wood base
(75 x 22 cm)
by Marcel Rutti

The work of the contemporary Swiss artist Marcel Rutti has been described by a critic as "noteworthy not only for its creator's mastery of the art of mosaic, which he learned at Ravenna, but for its combinations of colours, its sense of movement, its serenity and its audacity". The inspiration for the work shown here was a performance by a group of young Spanish dancers whose families live in Switzerland and who are enthusiastically keeping alive their ancestral traditions. Cubes of marble and granite imbricated in wood produce an effect of rhythm and dynamism.

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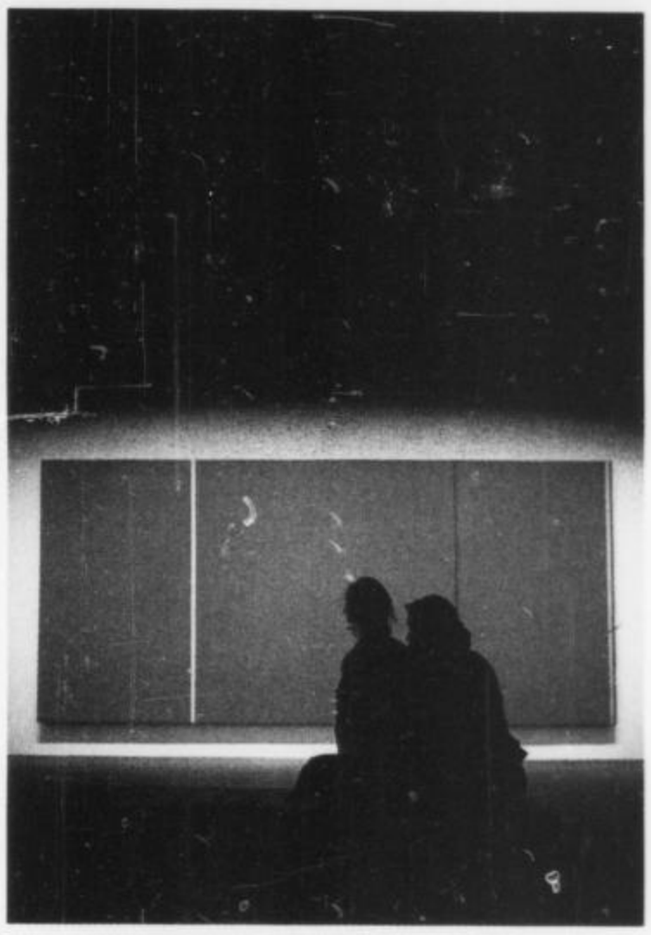

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LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

Cover: Visitors to the New York Museum of Modern Art contemplate a work by the American artist Mark Rothko (1903-1970). Photo by French artist Georges Servat.

Back cover: *Autumn Landscape* by the Chinese painter Wang Hui (1632-1717).

Special consultant for this issue:
NAHAL TADJADOD

Today there are no more unexplored continents, unknown seas or mysterious islands. But while we can overcome the physical barriers to exploration, the barriers of mutual ignorance between different peoples and cultures have in many cases still not been dismantled.

A modern Ulysses can voyage to the ends of the earth. But a different kind of Odyssey now beckons—an exploration of the world's many cultural landscapes, the ways of life of its different peoples and their outlook on the world in which they live.

It is such an Odyssey that the *Unesco Courier* proposes to its readers. Each month contributors of different nationalities provide from different cultural and professional standpoints an authoritative treatment of a theme of universal interest. The compass guiding this journey through the world's cultural landscapes is respect for human dignity.

Reading the world

■ **PAULO FREIRE.** We have often compared our experiences of literacy work. The lessons you have learned from your research in ethnoscience coincide in many respects with what I have called "reading the world".

I have always insisted that literacy, thought of in terms of reading words, must necessarily be preceded by the "reading" or "deciphering" of the world around us. Learning to read and write is tantamount to "re-reading" the world of our experience.

It must never be forgotten that, long before they begin to learn to form letters, the very young have learned to speak, to manipulate oral language. Through their family experience, they "read" the reality of the world around them long before they can write about it. Later they simply write what they have learned to say.

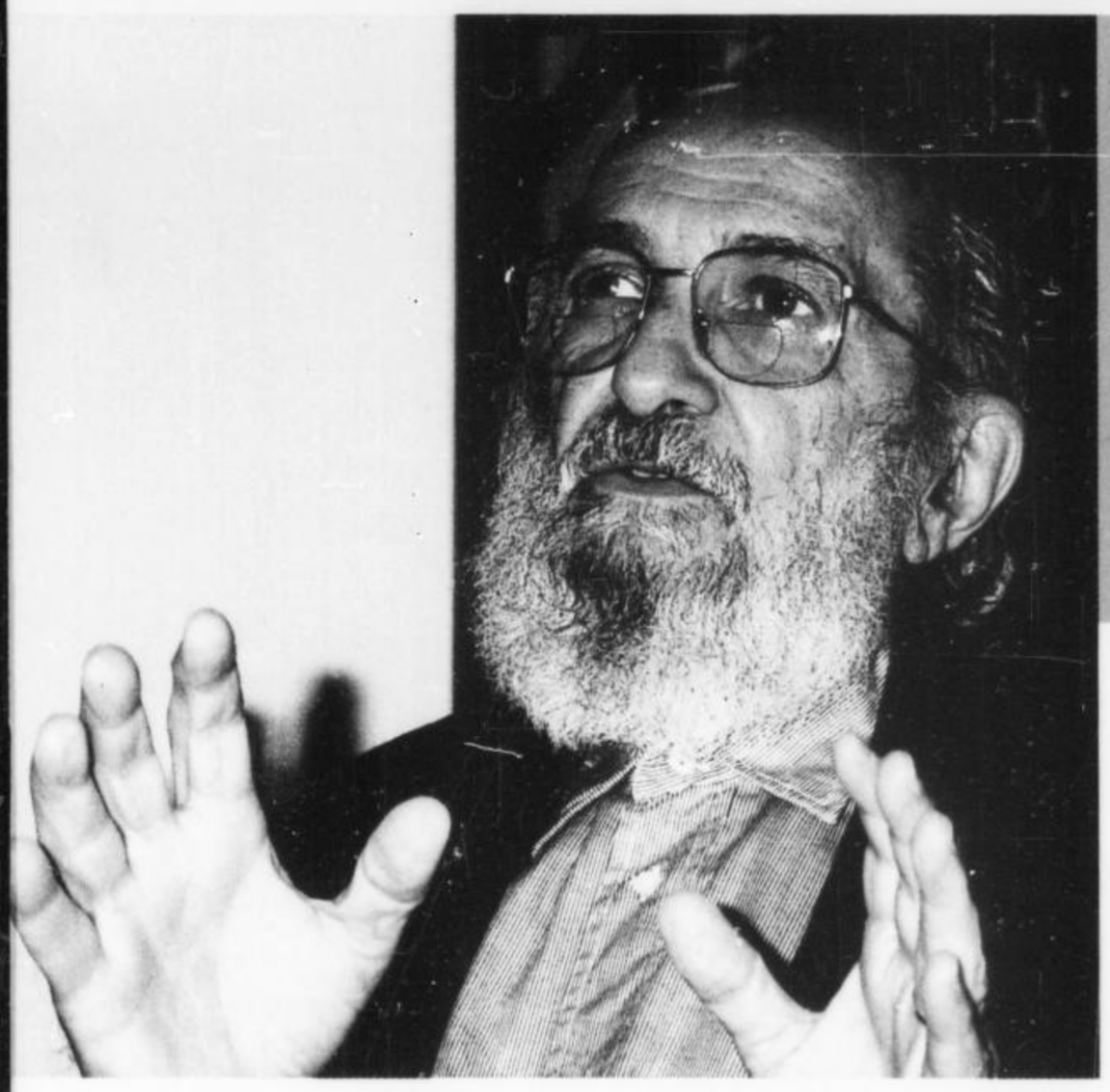
Any literacy training process must take this historical and social fact into account and use it systematically so as to encourage pupils to practise oral expression, which is inseparably linked to what I call "reading the world". Indeed, it is this first reading of the world that incites children to express, by means of signs and sounds, what they have learned from the universe around them.

Literacy work must take this reality as its point of departure and refer to it constantly so as to make possible, thanks to the greater breadth of knowledge that reading and writing confer, a more profound decipherment, a "re-reading" of the world once it has been discovered.

Depending upon the culture involved, this learning process centres on two poles. On the one hand there is what might be termed "spontaneous" knowledge; on the other there is "rigorous" or "scientific" knowledge. In each of us, there is a conflict between the two. The demands of rigour are never totally clear and unequivocal and never free from ideological influences; traces of ideological tendencies always remain, in the very rigour with which we disclaim our own ideological background.

■ **MARCIO D'OLNE CAMPOS.** I have long been interested in the differences between the various types of knowledge—popular, tribal and scientific. With regard to what you call the "re-reading of the world", the example of various Indian peoples has led me to a radical revision of my conception of the role of the educator.

Lack of a system of writing has not prevented these peoples from devising other methods of recording their vision of the world and of expressing their relationship with their immediate environment and the universe at large. This they convey through personal ornamentation, rites, myths, and intensive use of the spoken word. Their close involvement with their environment induces the first, original



Paulo Freire

The noted Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and his friend Marcio D'Olne Campos, ethnoscientist and teacher, exchange reflections on literacy teaching and discuss the purpose and conditions of a truly popular form of education

"reading of the world", which precedes—indeed, makes possible—the creation of signs and symbols. The "re-reading of the world" is thus made manifest through a whole system of expression that antecedes the symbolism of the alphabet proper.

This point is a vital one and is almost universally applicable. In our own Brazilian society, for instance, apparently arbitrarily selected characters are often imposed on children, sometimes in an intimidating manner, although they bear no relation to their experience or the symbolism they use to express it. Educators do not always seem to be aware that there may be other symbols than those which they want to teach their pupils. The gap between teacher and pupil is even greater in the case of children from Indian societies, in which the original symbolism is linked to myths and rites.

I see this standpoint in the world which is specific to each one of us as the necessary starting point and the raison d'être of literacy work. We cannot ask children to remain isolated, as though in a glass capsule, while learning to read and write, and only later require them to begin to "read" the world around them.

■ **P.F.** I want to stress that teaching should always take into account the differing levels of knowledge that children bring with them when they come to school. This intellectual baggage is an expression of what might be called their cultural identity and this, of course, is linked to the sociological concept of class. The teacher must take into account this initial "reading of the world" that children bring with, or, rather, within them. For each child, this has been fashioned within the setting of his or her own home, locality, and town, and is strongly influenced by social origins.

Schools tend, almost invariably, to discount this prior knowledge. I am always astonished by the disdain with which schools, with a few happy exceptions, treat the perceptual, existential, "lived" experience acquired by the child outside the school confines. It is as though they want to erase this other form of language, which constitutes the child's way of being, sensibility and initial vision of the world, from his or her mental and physical memory.

This lack of respect for the child's experience has consequences that are far more deleterious than is generally realized. It implies a failure to recognize all the inventiveness, the hundred-and-one artful tricks that children from less

Opposite page, child drawing on a Cape Verde beach. Right, painting by Zhou Han, age 6. This painting and those on pages 6 to 9 are by Chinese children. They have been kindly sent to us by their art teacher.

favoured backgrounds employ to defend themselves against a world that tends to oppress them.

I am not against the assessment of levels of knowledge in schools. What I object to is the fact that such assessments should only cover knowledge acquired at school, as if it had been laid down that nothing important happens outside school or school hours. No attempt is ever made to forge a sufficiently strong link between what children learn in school and what they learn in the world outside.

■ **M.C.** The world the child is already deciphering.

■ **P.F.** And which he or she never ceases to decipher. This lack of consideration towards knowledge derived from experience seems to me to be not only an ideologico-political choice, but also to indicate a certain scientific incompetence. Schools are authoritarian and élitist because they furnish ready-made knowledge, a package that is supposedly complete. Such a conception of knowledge is scientific nonsense, an epistemological falsification. There is no such thing as a closed system of knowledge. All knowledge is constituted within the setting of history, never outside it. All new knowledge springs from the decay of previous knowledge which was itself once innovative. Knowledge is born when one has the humility to accept that such knowledge will, in its turn, decay. Sometimes certain scientists seem to forget this.

Having said this, neither you nor I would want to confine children to the knowledge they had before they went to school. On the contrary, we want pupils to learn to understand better what they already know, so that, in their turn, they will become the creators of new knowledge.

■ **M.C.** Here we touch on a theme we are both familiar with—that of the role of error in the pedagogical process. The French epistemologist Gaston Bachelard suggested a pedagogical system based on error, which involved seeing mistakes not as the aberrations of a tired mind, but as an

"epistemological obstacle", a barrier to the act of knowing and a challenge to reality from the person faced with it. Errors can thus be seen as "ideological obstacles" which deny the existence of or block the way to the birth of new knowledge.

■ **P.F.** Bachelard's concept of error should be democratized. If all educators regarded error not as in itself a barrier to understanding but as an obstacle of an ideological nature, then error itself would become a necessary step in the progress of knowledge.

Teachers should, by word and deed, show their pupils that error is not the sign of a serious gap in their knowledge or a proof of their incompetence, but, on the contrary, a legitimate step in the learning process. Rather like someone who looks first to his right for something that he will eventually find on his left.

Once this inflection is given to the notion of error, the whole pedagogical relationship is profoundly changed. Not only does it ease the concept of learning for the child, it also encourages the teacher to adopt a more modest approach and relieves him of some of the burden of authority. Under the authoritarian conception of error, error enables the teacher to assert his power and to punish.

■ **M.C.** To punish in the classic meaning of the word.

■ **P.F.** In the strictly classic sense—write out a hundred times "I shall not make a mistake again"; to be kept in; to be sent out of the room. This kind of thinking goes beyond the intellectual plane. There is a danger that the pupil will see error as a moral and cultural stain, as some kind of unforgivable sin in some way linked to his or her social origins.

Far from being static, curiosity is perpetual, symbolic movement. The curious mind cannot approach, grasp or assimilate the object of its attention without feeling its way or without making mistakes. When error is regarded as the logical outcome of curiosity, it should never be punished.

Once this "error complex", this feeling of culpability, has been eliminated, the knowledge that pupils bring with them must be made an integral part of the dialogue that is established between the class and the teacher. By its nature, scientific rigour involves moments of complete spontaneity. I would even go so far as to say that absolute rigour does not exist, but co-exists with spontaneity and even arises from it. Neither scientists nor teachers have the right to scorn what is known as "popular wisdom" and even less to exclude it so as to impose a supposedly rigorous explanation of the world.

What we want is a pedagogical method, which, while not rejecting the demands of rigour, gives scope to spontaneity and emotion and adopts as its point of departure what I might call the pupils' perceptual, historical and social "here and now".

■ **M.C.** I would like here to refer to my experience of "ethnoscience", which is the ethnography of knowledge as seen through local group practices in the formulation of knowledge and techniques. By definition, therefore, it is a discipline devoid of any trace of ethnocentricity.

In order to understand the body of knowledge accumulated by a minority culture, it must be learned from the inside. First one has to explore the vast network of words, the world of basic notions that makes a link between man and nature that is specific to that culture. How can this be done? By adopting, from the start, the position of an apprentice compiler of knowledge and playing the card of spontaneity. As an educator I might also add, by accepting the spontaneity of others, just as we accept our own. This means sharing the child's culture within the classroom.

Opposite page above: painting by Ean Ya-Feng, age 7. Opposite page below: a village in the Brazilian forest. This page, paintings by Ye Peng, age 6.

■ **P.F.** Yes, the ideal standpoint is acceptance of the spontaneity of others.

■ **M.C.** In this way, I prepare myself for a real dialogue. Coming to grips, without preconceptions, with a different cultural context is the fundamental precondition of my work as an ethnoscientist. I have to call upon all my ingenuity, all my freshness of mind, if I am to understand the tools of thought and action and the categories of thought that are inherent in tribal societies. Only later, and very gradually, is it possible to systematize.

This experience, and especially my work on the knowledge of astronomy of the Indians of the island of Búzios, in the Brazilian state of São Paulo, has had a great influence on my work as an educator. I learned that what you, Paulo, call the "minimal vocabulary" is much vaster than the actual words that are used. The word is much more than a sign; it is a symbolic, all-encompassing discourse. The symbolical signification which impregnates the communication of these groups of people with their world is as structured as their language. Both come together in the deciphering of the universe and the constitution of knowledge into themes for reflection.

It is this vital relationship between nature and society, a relationship which is the fount of culture, that we are trying to comprehend in depth. Like the teacher, the scientific researcher must work in what might be called the "laboratory of life". This is not to denigrate the scientific facilities available to us—books, laboratory research, programme content, in short, all official knowledge. It is, however, essential to put this official knowledge into perspective, on the spot, to ensure that we do not inflict on children abstract exercises dreamed up by people who are insufficiently competent.

In our research, therefore, we have been obliged to give pride of place, as our starting point, to notions of space and time which, in each case, provide a different framework and colouring to our natural and cultural environment and thus form the whole basis of our presence in the world. The questions we put to the various disciplines, to the various repositories of knowledge, are formulated in terms of the questions this presence in the world asks of us. Both in the school and in the field, this has led to a trans-disciplinary approach. We move freely from one method of exploring knowledge to another.

Thanks to this listening in to the world, we are able to rediscover and verify our knowledge in another cultural context—the world of the pupil. We are making progress not in our own knowledge, but in the knowledge of others.

■ **P.F.** Once again one must deplore the dirigiste approach adopted by many educators. It is impossible to comprehend intuitively the knowledge of the Indians you have been talking about. First of all you must immerse yourself in the setting and conditions that have given rise to that knowledge. This is what many intellectuals refuse to do. Even when they expound progressive ideas, their practices remain deeply authoritarian and their ideology remains élitist. Although, perhaps, they would not admit it to themselves, for them only institutionalized knowledge is true knowledge. In fact, they see no value in popular wisdom, which they consider to be imperfect, insignificant and not worth talking about.

This reminds me of a rather revealing anecdote. It was during a meeting at which the working methods of peasants had been discussed. A group of intellectuals had just finished a lengthy discussion, when a peasant got up to speak. "The way things are going," he said, "I don't see any point in continuing. We shall never reach agreement. You over there"—and with a humorous gesture he emphasized the class distance that separated the two groups despite the fact that they were in the same room—"you over there are preoccupied with the salt, whereas for us what counts is the sauce." The room fell silent. The intellectuals asked themselves perplexedly what the peasant was getting at. His companions, on the other hand, knew exactly what he meant and were waiting for a reply.

In his terse, simple language, the peasant was saying "The discussion is going round in circles because you are looking only at a fragment of reality whereas we see it as a whole. We are thinking about things as a whole without stopping to examine details, whereas you, who are always talking about the overall picture, are getting bogged down in details." Salt is only one ingredient in the sauce, but the sauce symbolizes the sum of all the ingredients. This was a metaphor that revealed an analytical capacity that certain intellectuals did not expect to find in a peasant.

In my view, knowledge and competence are only of value—always relative, but nevertheless considerable—if one is aware that they are, like human beings, necessarily partial and imperfect.

Top, woman spinning in a Brazilian village. Above and opposite page, paintings by Zhao Cheng, age 6.

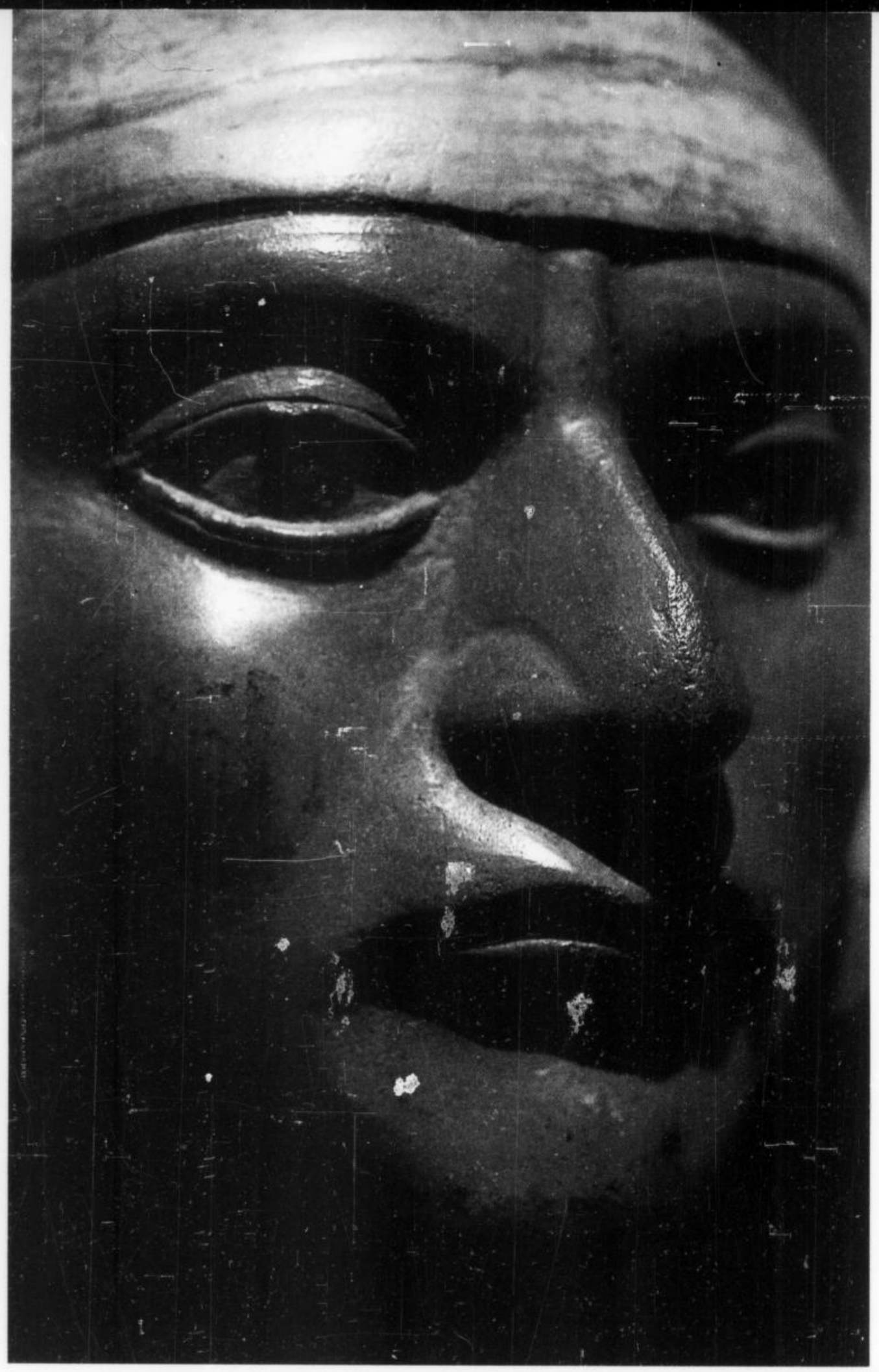
PAULO FREIRE, of Brazil, is an internationally known educator. His many works translated into English include *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Herder & Herder, New York, 1970), *Pedagogy in Progress: the Letters to Guinea-Bissau* (Seabury Press, New York, 1978), and *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 1985).

MARCIO D'OLNE CAMPOS is a Brazilian physicist with an interest in ethnoscience, ethnoastronomy and education. He is the founder-director of the Aldebaran observatory at the University of Campinas, São Paulo state, Brazil.

■ **M.C.** The fact is that, from the moment when we think of them in terms of movement and not as a definitive achievement, all forms of knowledge and competence are, as Piaget said, constantly brought into question. Everything seems to indicate that the equilibrium we seek as we attempt to construct our knowledge is doomed to be destroyed as soon as it is achieved. If we accept the idea that knowledge is an ongoing process, then we must always be ready to retrace our steps. We accept this disequilibrium because we know that it is the prerequisite of a new equilibrium.

This position is just as valid for the teacher as for his relationship with others. This other being who speaks to you from a marginal, minority culture that is quite different from your own, is capable of introducing you to his or her cultural context if only you are prepared to accept the disequilibrium. Return to a state of equilibrium is dependent upon contact and dialogue and not upon a way of thinking that will leave you isolated in your so-called competence. For me, the key to literacy training lies in this kind of intensive, dynamic interaction.

■ **P.F.** What conclusion can we draw from all this? It is the same for us all, whether we are Latin American schoolchildren, students in Asia or university teachers in Europe or America: friend, please never lose your capacity for wonder and astonishment in the world which you regard and in which you live. ■



EDITORIAL

MANY thinkers have sought universally acceptable principles of beauty and aesthetic value but their quarry has proved elusive. "The trouble about beauty," Sir Ernst Gombrich has written, "is that tastes and standards of what is beautiful differ so much." The French poet Paul Valéry gracefully side-stepped the issue when he said that the beautiful is that which drives us to despair.

The modern world has largely abandoned this quest. Here as in other fields the spirit of relativism has triumphed, swept away authoritarian concepts, and frustrated attempts to reduce the many forms of beauty to a single Ideal such as that sought by the ancients. In some significant works of modern art the idea of perfection, of "getting it right", has been rejected. The onlooker is induced to feel that there is beauty in all things.

Paradoxically, beauty asserts its presence and its essential unity through the very diversity and ubiquity of its manifestations. Although it may escape intellectual analysis, it proclaims itself to the senses. There may be no golden rule, but a sense of beauty has always existed, fluctuating constantly in the human mind.

Detail of a vase in the form of a portrait head, 200 BC-600 AD. Art of the pre-Columbian Mochica culture, northern Peru.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

—GOOD morning, may I ask you a question?

— Please do.

— What exactly are the "canons of beauty"?

— A canon is a criterion, a model or an ideal. I believe the word comes from the name of a statue by the ancient Greek sculptor Polyclitus, which Herodotus called the Canon *because of its ideal form.*

— So I'd be right in thinking that there are such things as canons of beauty.

— Yes, of course. But they vary.

— How do you mean?

— What the Greeks considered beautiful, the Indians did not, and vice versa. In ancient India, the finest compliment you could pay a woman was to say that her thighs were like those of an elephant. That wouldn't be a very flattering thing to say today.

— Certainly not.

— In classical Japan, at the peak of the Heian civilization in the eleventh century, elegant aristocratic ladies painted their teeth black.

— And what about those African women who lengthen their necks?

— And the Amazon Indians who stretch their lower lips?

— What beauty can they see in that, I wonder.

— To us, it's neither beautiful nor pleasant. But it's one of their customs.

— Yet it seems to me that we all know a pretty woman when we see one—take film stars, for instance.

— You said pretty, not beautiful.

— That's true.

— Beauty, beauty, nobody really knows what it means. Sorry to keep going on about India, but in India a woman's beauty is thought of primarily as an inner quality, the profound and personal sign of someone who has fulfilled her life, her dharma. *That's why people hardly ever say that a woman is beautiful until she's over fifty. When she's young, she may be pretty or nice-looking or attractive, but beauty comes later.*

— How complicated it all is!

— Everything human is complicated. If you asked me to talk about simplicity, for example, I wouldn't know how to begin. Nothing could be less simple than simplicity.

— Yet you often see a man or a woman or a child and everybody says how beautiful they are.

— ...or a cat, or a car...

— But the fact is, everyone agrees.

— In our society, perhaps, almost everyone agrees. Beauty is a matter of consensus, you see, a cultural phenomenon, an arbitrary and mysterious convention in each society.

— Nonsense! You can't be right! There must be a universal concept of beauty! And ugliness! Some colours clash, some horses are

Women from Myanmar (formerly Burma).

JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIÈRE, French author, dramatist and scriptwriter, is director of FEMIS, a cinema and audiovisual school in Paris. He has adapted the great Indian epic the *Mahabharata* for the stage and, for the screen, Edmond Rostand's play *Cyrano de Bergerac*. His publications include "Conversation on the Invisible" (1988), written in collaboration with Jean Audouze and Michel Cassé, and "The Mahabharata" (1989), both published by Belfond, Paris.

BY JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIÈRE

too thin, some dogs are too fat, some trees are gnarled and bent, and...

— Take it easy, of course you're right. Of course there are people, of both sexes, who seem to move around in an aura of beauty... what Salvador Dalí would have called pythagorean beauty. But even here not everyone might agree...not to mention dogs and trees. Take the case of my father. He couldn't stand fashion models. He thought they had legs like rabbits—not very attractive animals in his opinion. But I don't agree with him at all.

— You like rabbits?

— I like models. I love it when I see them turning and pirouetting on the catwalk. It makes me feel dizzy. I never look at the dresses. How about you?

— I don't often go to fashion shows.

— Nor do I. But I watch them on television.

— What about body-building, do you find that beautiful?

— Goodness, no!

— My son thinks he's too skinny so he's taken up weight lifting. It worries me.

— It makes the veins stand out. It's horrible.

— You've said it yourself: it's horrible.

— I'd be the first to admit that we let ourselves be trapped by words. Ah, beauty! What a complicated business it all is, especially when we're not talking about people. You mentioned horses and trees. What about houses, landscapes, the thousand-and-one utensils and objects we use each day? What about the feelings works of art inspire in us? You might say that a cathedral is beautiful, or a play by Beckett, or a Mozart symphony. Or the sea, the sky, a meadow, or a soul. We may find a sunset enchanting, but who knows whether a Martian would? Who knows whether a Martian would have the foggiest idea about what we call beauty?

— You look sad all of a sudden.

— No wonder. It's quite impossible to define what moves us. However hard we try we never get to the bottom of it.

— Maybe that's precisely why we *are* moved by beautiful things—because they can't be defined, labelled and put into little boxes.

— Remember what the witches say in Macbeth: *"Fair is foul, and foul is fair..." Where is all this getting us? It's enough to drive one to despair!*

— Come on, pull yourself together. It's not as bad as all that.

— But it is!

— I should never have asked you that question in the first place.

— But it's a question I ask myself every day! Harmony, beauty ... it's all too complicated for us. It's an unfathomable mystery. Everyone who's tried to establish criteria for beauty has failed. It reminds me of a stupid remark made by a critic called Emile Bayard around the turn of the century. This is what he wrote: "If ever we saw giraffes, elephants, tigers and lions running around in our dear old countryside, we should have to admit that nature had no taste."

— Incredible.

— But true. It's always the same. We think the world is imperfect, we want to improve it at all costs, but we just can't. That's what gets me down. You're quite right.

— Look at that woman walking past. That one over there.... Do you think *she's* beautiful?

— Where?

— Over there. That tall brunette, the one wearing blue stockings.

— Oh yes. Magnificent!

— I think so too. So there we are. We agree.

— Delighted to hear it! But I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me. I have to rush off. I've got an appointment...

— Of course. Don't let me keep you. Well well ... are you going in the same direction as she is?

— Yes, I am.

— Fancy that! So am I! What a coincidence! Do you mind if we stroll along together?

— Why not?

— Beautiful day, isn't it?

— Beautiful. ■

The transient and the timeless

The inner light

of beauty

shines across

the ages

with a mysterious

radiance

A living eternity

BY AYYAM WASSEF

"I am beautiful, o mortals, like a dream of stone"
Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*

"And my body, I know, is true eternity"
The ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead

Above, dancers at a banquet. Detail from an Egyptian tomb painting (c. 1400 BC). Opposite page left: Marlene Dietrich, the German-born American actress, in *Dishonored* (1931), a film directed by Josef von Sternberg; at right, a painted limestone bust of Nefertiti, queen of Egypt (14th century BC), preserved in the Egyptian Museum, Berlin.

THE desert, place of all beginnings, should perhaps be our point of departure. If we are to glimpse the secret of those who built for eternity, perhaps we should rediscover the desert as it was before the pyramids were built. I am no historian and I say "perhaps" to authorize myself to imagine this legendary starting point, to visualize the birth of ancient Egyptian art.

There are countries where this type of analysis of aesthetic activity seems to conform to their topography. Egypt is one of them. The land of Egypt is, basically, a tabula rasa on which the course of the Nile, from south to north, and that of the sun, from east to west, provide the coordinates of an ideal map, which already existed before it was known to man. Geometry is not the fruit of reasoning alone. Here shapes stand out against the even planes of the desert, in the pure, limpid light, with the precise beauty of a definition. The timeless horizon is spanned by the cyclical movement of the sun and cut by the flowing river, a living constant between two banks of eternity. In this land of constants, geometry is born of the ritual encounter of light and space. Symbol of symbols, this hallowed encounter spawns and reveals the very essence of aesthetics. "O Ra whose rays created the eyes of all living creatures..."

Dayr al-Bahri—the hallowed vision

The tall cliff face of the western mountain rises up on the left bank of the Nile. The mountain is an affirmation of all that the desert is not. The timeless desert is a gaping, motionless immensity, open to the winds. The slightest breeze fashions landscapes or carves out pathways that are constantly erased. The fluid chaotic sliding of the sand acts as a form of self-suppression that is time itself (or its absence, which amounts to the same thing). Simultaneously encompassing past, present and future, the desert is fully aware of the absolute present of abstractions. The desert has no memory, no history and is open to all eventualities. It is the zero point of history, even the history of the Earth itself.

In contrast, a mountain is solidity itself. A mountain has a memory, conserving the furrows gouged by the wind and accepting their successors. It is a monument, a record of history, a cryptogram of time. A mountain can be visualized, but the desert always eludes our grasp. Like any inert solid, a mountain can be imagined. Unlike the desert, it is raw material waiting to be given a shape. Who fashions these shapes? Not the wind, which carves unwittingly, forming shadows in the dark. To shape is to make visible. The prime fashioner of shapes is the sun.

The eye of the sun is the first to look upon the dark mountain. As the sunlight describes contours, it affords a host of viewpoints and of unchanging images. As it lights up the mountain, the sun gives a shape to the dark polymorphous mass, and this first fashioning is indeed a "birth", a "coming to light" which is akin to the process whereby a notion comes to the mind of an artist.

Mimicking the sun, the eye creates the world in all its beauty. The solar eye etches the dark mountain with its rays and carves out its own temple. Dayr al-Bahri, the funerary temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Thebes, is carved out of the western mountain just as the mountain itself was carved out of darkness. A pastiche of the natural art of the architect-sun, it reveals the laws governing its own creation and the process by which the eye brings a whole world to light. The temple hallows the solar metaphor of the eye as the sculptor of the world. We are at the beginning, the moment when time becomes time; the creative act is not a part of the historical process; it marks a new beginning. The temple of Dayr al-Bahri is a temple fashioned by the creator's eye. Its beauty, breaking away from the eternity of the desert, makes history possible. What we refer to as the "dark mists of time" precede the enlightening, creative irruption of the eye's vision. This is what the temple of Dayr al-Bahri has captured for ever in stone—the beauty of the world at its birth.

The bas-reliefs of memory

Although the creative act inaugurates time, it also inscribes its own history therein. The walls, ceilings and columns of Egyptian temples are covered with carvings portraying rituals, liturgies and scenes of war. On the porticoes of Hatshepsut's funerary temple, bas-relief carvings depict the divine birth of the Queen, the naval expedition to the land of Punt (the Somali coast),

AYYAM WASSEF,
Egyptian essayist, is preparing a doctoral thesis at the University of Paris I on the theme of the individual in contemporary philosophy. Her publications include a study of the German-Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. She is currently writing an account of her experiences as an Egyptian living in Paris.

and record for eternity the glory of the sovereign. So subtle is the delineation that it seems more like drawing than sculpture. The sculptors followed the pattern set by the wind, the outer walls of monuments are hollowed out while those inside are raised. They carved out the background of the scene so that the details of each figure are revealed by the slightest of surface variations. The sculptor's hand informs the stone, engraving in it a memory destined to last throughout eternity.

This is why each artist respected the famous "conventions", or rituals of his craft, the first of which was the law of ideal proportion. Any personal innovation would destroy the permanence sought. Whereas the carvings made by the wind on the mountainside can be modified by other winds, the artist tames erosion, takes command of the wind and imposes his law upon it. By perpetuating the sculptor's act, technique confers stability.

Thus the exploits of a specific monarch, recounted in accordance with superhuman rules, escape the realm of history and are inscribed in eternity. Everything is portrayed in accordance with conventions whose disdain for perspective demonstrates that beauty is not a personal revelation. The viewpoint is that of the sun, the vision of the ultimate eye, beside which any subjective vision is an illusion, if not a misconception. In the incorruptibility of matter, in the unity of a form, "man has become Man" and has joined the immortal gods.

The art of the fresco— eternity in rhythm

"Nothing in art, not even movement, should appear accidental". This remark by Degas, which he used to describe his own technique for conveying the ethereal grace of a dancer in the immobility of a drawing, applies with uncanny accuracy to the frescoes of ancient Egypt. Degas also portrayed figures in profile yet looking out of the picture, sometimes in scenes painted from the wings and sometimes when he brilliantly juxtaposed figures in movement and repose.

Critics have long commented on the static quality of Egyptian art and denounced its "strange blindness". But it is precisely through tireless repetition of the same outline that purity of line can be achieved. Symbolic painting captures the essence of the dancer's movement, the epitome of all movement. Think of the rigorous training of dancers, their obstinate repetition of each movement until it becomes exaggerated. In performing her dance, a dancer must free herself from her body and reach abstraction, the very

The temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Dayr al-Bahri, 15th century BC.

heart of the dance, its truth. The dancer can thus be seen as an incarnation of drawing. Egyptian painting is full of dancers and dances, from the sacred, ritual dances performed in homage to the goddess Hathor to the secular dances that are portrayed in banqueting scenes. We see the dancers, agile magicians, moving in eternity.

Three dancers are shown cunningly interlaced, as though snapped by a camera at different stages of a single movement. They perform pirouettes, leg lifts, and the acrobatic "wheel"—the feathery lightness of the outline indicating that the movement is incomplete. The same method is used to portray processions, with individual members of the crowd depicted in successive poses indicating forward movement. We hear the rhythm of their step, just as we hear the unceasing lament of the mourners in the slow motion expression of their collective grief.

Beauty is present, then, in a living eternity. Far from being motionless in time, it oscillates between what has been and what is to come. This is the rhythmic beat of a masterpiece, looking towards its future interpretations, for beauty carries on an "invincible dialogue" with time.

Beauty and time

Breaking with the primeval desert, the temple of Hatshepsut set history in motion and on it inscribed its memory, but it too was exposed to the vagaries of time—the winds of history—as dynastic rivalries inflicted upon the temple another form of erosion. After the death of

Hatshepsut, Thutmose III defiled her memory, breaking statues and hammering out her name. Yet for us these mutilated faces are still works of art. The mutilations of some of them have proved fortunate in the sense that they struck a chord among admirers of a later age. Time revives beauty, and beauty senses this and glows at this hoped-for encounter. A work of art originates a dream which it is our business to perpetuate; its endless journey in time is helped along by a procession of constantly changing onlookers.

The glorious destiny of the unfinished head of Nefertiti in the Cairo Museum is perhaps an illustration of this regenerating dialogue. With its barely outlined features and painted lips, it calls for an unending process of interpretation. Beauty is already there, but the unfinished state informs us that there is yet more to come.

However, the fascination that this sublime sketch, perhaps no more than a sculptor's trial run, holds for us today probably owes even more to its unfinished state than to the fame of Queen Nefertiti. She is "sublime" since we see in her our own modernity. It is tempting to reply, paraphrasing Schoenberg, that she is not modern, she is simply unfinished. But incompleteness is the order of the day. The proof of this is that the unfinished head has finally eclipsed the completed, fully-painted portrait bust of Nefertiti in the Berlin Museum. Is it over-done? In this perfectly finished head, the unexpected angle formed by the dip of the vast head-dress and the queen's graceful neck bears witness to an artistic mastery which is itself divine. But let the divine hold its peace; silence can be more eloquent than words. There are negative forms of aesthetics in which beauty is remarkable by its absence. It is not surprising that the unfinished head of Nefertiti should become the idol of moderns who prefer writing to what is written and fragments to poems.

When the enigma of the beginning, of the primordial birth, has been solved, it would seem that to live again in a new era is simply to repeat in new deserts the rite of commencement. The faces of Egyptian statuary smile at this children's game of making, unmaking, remaking time, which, after all, simply means coming to terms with time itself.

There is nothing particularly Egyptian in wanting to overcome the harsh transitoriness of existence and to pursue in the permanence of creation the impossible dream of immortality. This may be an heroic struggle, but it is no less banal for that. What is less banal is, in the desperate search for the most suitable means of greeting the eternal, to have penetrated to the essential nature of things. The greatest achievement of all, in seeking the guidelines that deliver one from death, is to have found the secret of perpetual life—to have known how to create forms that will be capable, thousands of years later, of engendering new meaning. ■

Above, unfinished head in rose quartzite of Queen Nefertiti (14th century BC), preserved in the Cairo Museum. Right, Greta Garbo (1905-1990) in Rouben Mamoulian's film *Queen Christina* (1933).

BY ARBY OVANESSIAN

Starlight

THE opening sequence of a remarkable Korean film, "Why has Bodhi Dharma gone East?", shows a red light flashing on and off at regular intervals in the corner of the screen. As it punctuates the moving images in a kind of visual counterpoint, it calls to mind the aesthetic canon that governs the cinema, the art of moving light. In the final images of the film, a liberated bird flies up into the early morning sky like a star, while on the earth below a man and his cow walk together in harmony.

"Bodhi Dharma", with its flickering light of water, fire and colour, with its sound and silence, is a film that conjures up the beauty and wisdom of the East, where emotion is a pure, immediate response which is made spontaneously without any prompting from the intellect. In this way beauty blossoms in the universe. In skilful hands the camera can capture and reveal the inner laws of the invisible world. When it does so, there is a moment of liberation at which we witness a pure act. Such a moment occurs in "Bodhi Dharma" in a scene when an orphan child enters a temple and takes over the room of a newly "departed" master.

The great Bengali director Satyajit Ray has described how he and his fellow students at the Visva-Bharata university founded by Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan in India were taught to draw a tree by making strokes from the base upwards, in a movement which is in keeping with the process of organic growth. At the same time they were asked to "Consider Fujiyama... fire within and calm without...the symbol of the true Oriental artist". This Oriental canon of beauty, which is so essential for the understanding of the roots of creation and art, is also valid for a medium such as Western cinema which uses refined technology.

The soul of stardom

One of the great pioneers and masters of the art of cinema, the American director D.W. Griffith, believed that the sense of beauty is developed by environment. "If I had children," he said, "I should try to develop in them the sense of beauty. To do this, I should provide them with rooms of such simple beauty as that in which my father's orotund voice poured forth the music of Keats

and Tennyson and Shakespeare." Griffith continued his evocation of a setting in which beauty could blossom thus: "we see the truth in silence. Silence can be more eloquent than all the tongues of men...." Describing the qualities he sought in a film star, he wrote: "...Granted that the person has a face for the movie camera, a face that photographs well—the first thing needed is *soul.*"

Lillian Gish, one of Griffith's most famous discoveries, possessed this quality to an outstanding degree. She had already become a legend when she was in her early twenties and received the accolade of stardom—a portrait bust by the fashionable sculptor Boris Loski. In Griffith's film *Broken Blossoms* (1919) she made an unforgettably radiant appearance, her blonde hair silhouetted against a halo of light. In all her screen appearances she revealed a natural gift for radiating an inner light.

In the prologue to the silent epic *Ben-Hur,* made in Hollywood in 1926, the Virgin Mary was shown against a halo of backlight using the biochrome process, while the main story was filmed in black and white. This notion of colour emanating from pure white light is a remarkable example of cinematographic language and was used much later in many memorable films to depict beauty in glorious hues. However, despite technological progress in the use of colour, economic pressures forced film-makers to continue using black and white, but many directors used this technique so brilliantly that it was as vibrant as colour.

'The human face... a land one can never tire of exploring'

The play of light and shade on the human face was exploited with great artistry in such films as Carl Theodore Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc,* made in 1928 towards the end of the silent era. The crystal clarity of Dreyer's stylization made even silence vibrate. "Nothing in the world," he said, "can be compared to the human face. It is a land one can never tire of exploring. There is no greater experience in a studio than to witness the expression of a sensitive face under the mysterious power of inspiration, to see it animated from within and turning into poetry."

Hollywood was as sensitive as a celluloid negative to light and its mysteries. One of the great early directors, Josef von Sternberg, wrote that "Light means fire and heat and life.... Every subject has a moment when light can force its beauty into full power, and that brings us to the province of the artist.... Every light has a point where it is brightest."

Marlene Dietrich is the star who was most sensitive to Sternberg's use of light. She could feel on her skin the exact temperature needed to capture the luminosity of her beauty on film, and always used her finger as a meter to test the intensity of the lighting.

Light flickering from a fireplace inspired lighting director and cameraman William Daniels in Rouben Mamoulian's film *Queen Christina* (1933), which starred Greto Garbo and John Gilbert. A special lens was developed which was used to make a long tracking shot, culminating in an enigmatic close-up of Garbo's face. The beauty and composition of this sequence make it a landmark in the history and mythology of the cinema.

Fragile beauty

Hollywood jealously guarded from the public its techniques for creating the illusion of beauty. For the stars to retain their beauty and mystery was a demanding responsibility, and as the years went by and time left its marks very few of them

Right, the French actress Renée Falconetti (1892-1946) in the title role of Carl Theodore Dreyer's film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). Below, the American actress Katharine Hepburn in *Spitfire* (1934), directed by John Cromwell.

continued to face the cruel eye of the camera. Only rarely did inner and outer beauty meet successfully on the screen after the bloom of youth had faded.

One of the few celebrated exceptions was Katharine Hepburn, who first appeared on the scene as a young girl with freckles and wearing tennis shoes. Rouben Mamoulian, who directed her first professional performance as a maid in Turgenev's *A Month in the Country,* remembered: "She had only three replies in the play.... There was something about her—it's very difficult to describe in words. You can't describe music. There was—is—a kind of luminosity...there are some faces that project the light: hers does."

Hollywood immediately recognized in Hepburn that mysterious aura which is the emanation of an inner light. Because she had this quality, she was a natural choice to appear in RKO Studio's historic Technicolor tests for *St. Joan* in 1934. The only star who has been awarded four Oscars for her performances on the silver screen, Katharine Hepburn is one of those rare photogenic actresses with a "soul".

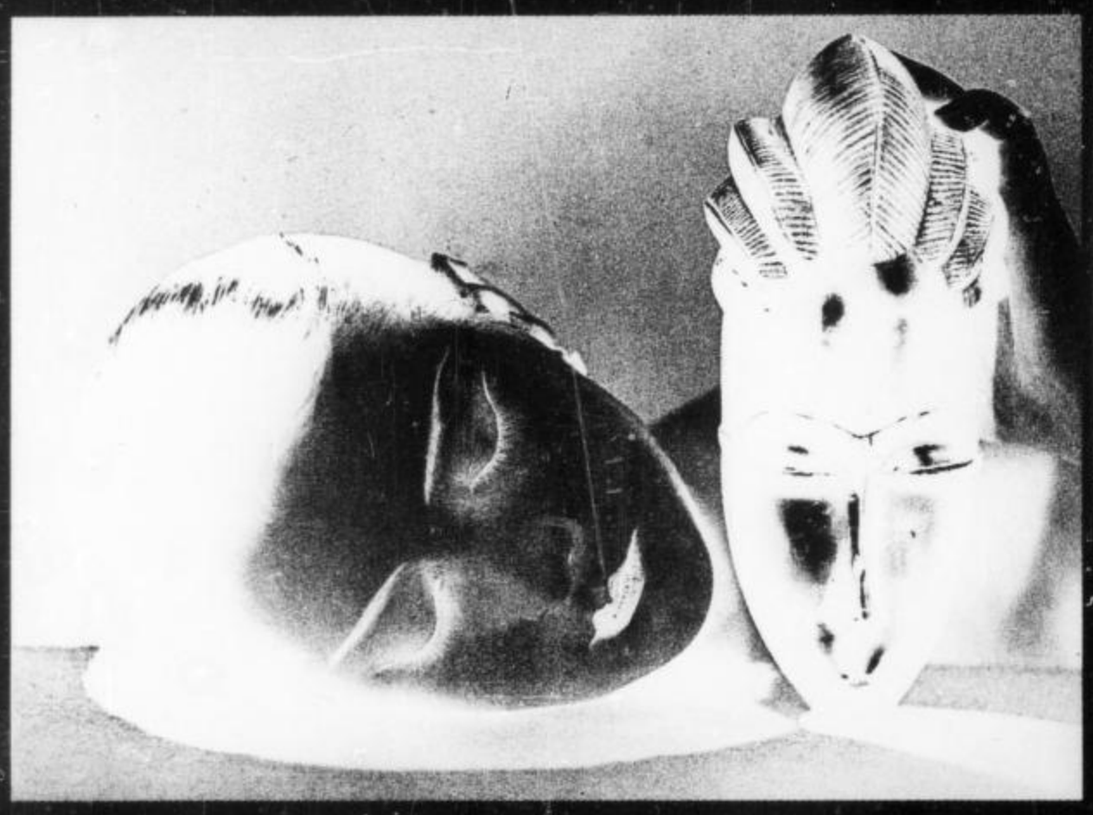
In time the glory of these beautiful faces which created the poetic canons of the cinema began to disappear from the screen. Film-makers began to use lighting that was harsh, crude and direct. However, two Soviet directors have revived the forgotten canons of traditional Oriental art and opened up new ways of depicting beauty.

The first of them, Andrei Tarkovsky, introduced the aesthetics of icon painting in his film about the life of the Russian painter Andrei Rublev. After taking us on a long guided journey through striking black and white images, the vibrant notes of a bell sound as he reveals, in full colour, fragments of Rublev's masterpiece, *The Old Testament Trinity.*

The second director, Serguei Paradjanov, returned to the techniques of silent cinema when he used an almost static camera in his film about the life of an eighteenth-century bard in the Caucasian mountains, *Sayat Nova—Colour of Pomegranates,* which is structured according to the canons of Oriental music. Meticulously composed and edited soundtrack and images take us back to a precise time and place, where from the mouths of silver-haired children holding sacred objects, we hear angelic, crystal-clear voices singing *Pity Us, Lord,* one of the most ancient and beautiful canticles. ■

ARBY OVANESSIAN,
Armenian-born Iranian stage and screen director, has directed over 30 plays which have been performed in many countries and notably at the Théâtre des Nations. He has also directed many short films and three features: *The Spring* (1970-1972), *How my Mother's Embroidered Apron Unfolds in my Life* (1983-1985), and *Rouben Mamoulian 88* (in progress).

Between the visible and the invisible



African masks

that suggest

the supernatural...

misty Chinese landscapes

that recreate

"the visual music

of the universe"...

ancient Greek statues

which depict

the gods in

human form...

portraits of the

divine in Indian art...

In the following

section we

look at these

attempts to

translate the invisible

into the visible.

The sound of silence

BY FRANÇOIS CHENG AND NAHAL TADJADOD

"THERE are painted landscapes that can be passed through or contemplated; others in which one can walk around; and yet others where one would like to stay or live. All these landscapes attain a degree of excellence. However, those in which one would like to live are superior to the others." Such was the view expressed by Kuo Hsi, a great landscape painter of the Song dynasty who lived in the eleventh century.

The painters of ancient China dreamt of a total communion between man and nature. Inasmuch as it partook of the mystery of creation, painting was considered to be an almost godlike activity. Underlying the practice of art, and indeed all Chinese aesthetic thought, was a philosophical vision based on the concept of the Void (that is, empty incipience).

The idea of the Void was already present in that seminal work of Chinese culture, the "Book of Changes" *(I Ching).* The philosophers who made it a central part of their doctrine were those of the Taoist school, the two founders of which, Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu,* exercised an unfailing influence on most art critics.

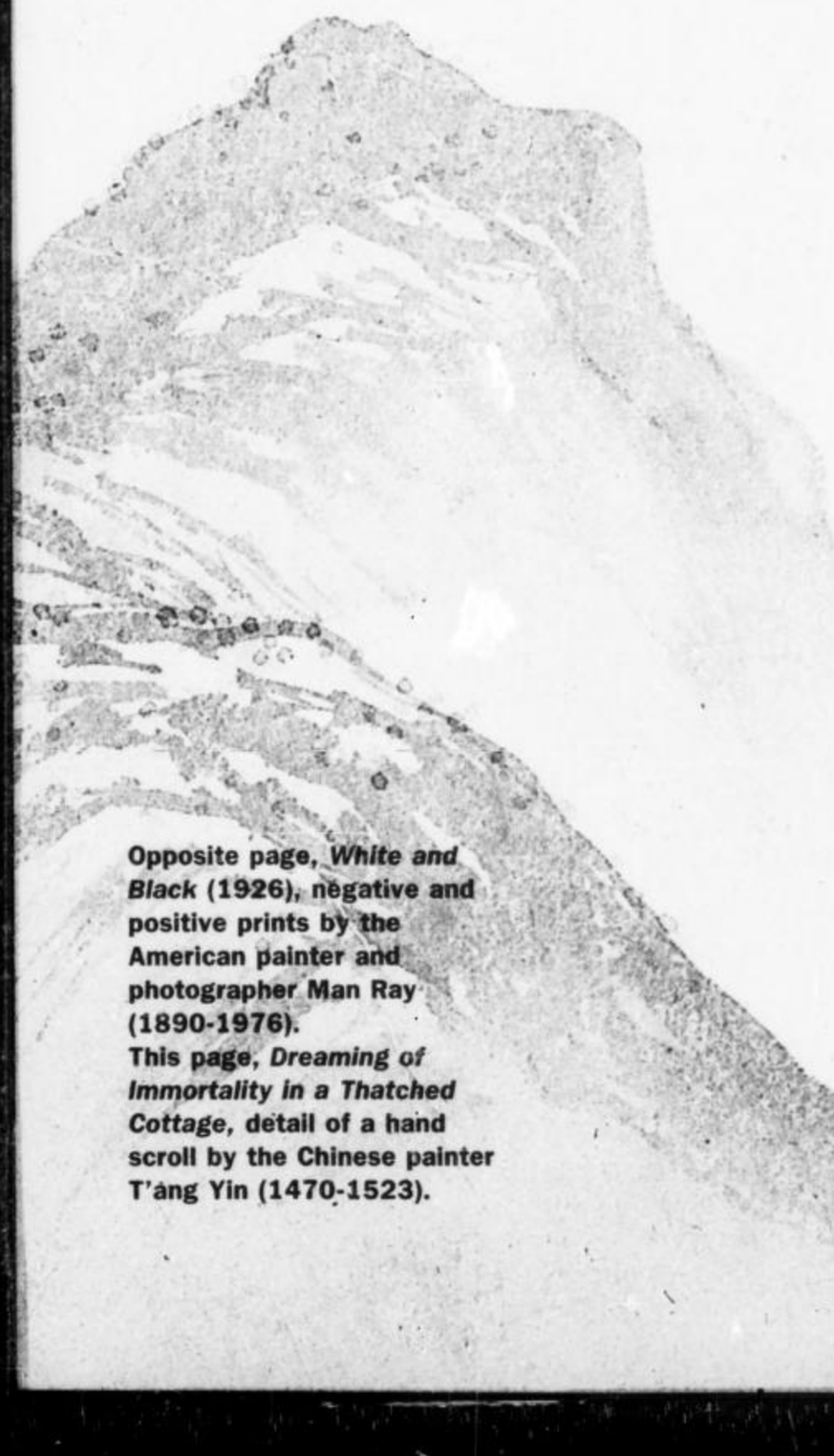
To the Chinese mind the Void was not something vague or non-existent but a highly dynamic and essential dimension of human life and of the life of the universe. Characterized by the perfect balance of the breath of life and of the Yin-Yang duality, at the heart of the interactions by which all things are governed, it was regarded as a space in which true plenitude could be achieved. It was through the Void that human beings could arrive at an all-embracing view of the universe. For this reason, in classical China the idea of the Void provided a key to mastering the noblest pursuits, ranging from the various forms of art to medicine or warfare.

'Straw sandals visits Son of Heaven'

In music, for instance, the Void is expressed by certain syncopated rhythms that punctuate the silences. Breaking the line of development, the silence creates a space through which the sounds can reach beyond themselves and attain a kind of resonance that outreaches resonance.

In poetry, one way of introducing the Void is to miss out certain grammatical links, known as "empty words". The linear, temporal progression of language is thus severed by the poet for the sake of an open-ended reciprocal relationship between the subject and the objective world. No longer is there any distinction between the inner world and the outer world. A kind of direct communion with things is thus established, as though the heart were speaking through them. .

One day Tu Fu (712-770), a famous poet of the Tang period (seventh-tenth centuries), appeared in rags before the emperor in exile. To point up the contrast between his pitiful state and



Opposite page, *White and Black* (1926), negative and positive prints by the American painter and photographer Man Ray (1890-1976).
This page, *Dreaming of Immortality in a Thatched Cottage*, detail of a hand scroll by the Chinese painter T'ang Yin (1470-1523).

the solemnity of the occasion, he left out the personal pronouns in the poem he then composed, declaring simply, not without a touch of irony, "Straw sandals visits Son of Heaven".

In a poem describing a farewell scene, Li Po (701-762), another famous poet of the Tang period, deliberately omits the words normally used to introduce a comparison: "Floating cloud peregrine mood/Setting sun spurned heart". He thereby "organically" links together human life and the world of nature, which does not serve as an external setting but forms an intrinsic part of the drama.

Those who have the dimension of emptiness within them efface the distance separating them from the outside world. The subject becomes at one and the same time absent and profoundly present. This fragmented language in which the Void is a driving force leaves room for the movements of the breath of life and thereby suggests the unsayable.

'By means of a slender brush, recreate the Void'

It is in painting however that the Void is given the most striking expression. In some paintings dating from the time of the Song and Yuan dynasties (tenth-fourteenth centuries), when Chinese painting was at its zenith, as much as two-thirds of the picture may be given over to the Void or, in other words, left unpainted. Emptiness is not an inert presence but is felt, on the contrary, to be charged with a vibrancy that links the visible world to an invisible world.

Even within the visible world (the painted area) the Void is still present. Thus between the mountain and the water, which are the two poles, the cloud represents the intermediate Void. The painter creates the impression that the mountain can be transformed into waves and, conversely, that the water can rise up in the form of a mountain. Both cease to be regarded as partial, opposing, unchanging elements; they embody the dynamic principle of reality as a whole.

By upsetting all linear perspective, the Void reveals this ever-present interaction between man and nature within the painting, on the one hand, and between the person looking at the painting and the painting itself on the other. The painting is thus meant to be "listened to" even more than to be seen. Producing a painting, or contemplating one, becomes an act of participation, a form of meditation in which reality is eased out by truth.

In this sense, painting in China is a philosophy in action, a sacred activity whose purpose is human fulfilment. Far from being seen as no more than an aesthetic object, a painting tends to recreate an "open" space where real living becomes possible. In the words of the poet and painter Wang Wei (699-759), "By means of a slender brush, recreate the immense body of the Void".

For Chinese painters, the brushstroke truly represents the process whereby man partakes of the act of creation. It is the link between man and the universe. It is a line that seeks to capture the breath of things. In China the art of the

Right, pen and ink portrait of the 8th-century Chinese poet Li Po, by Liang Kai (12th-13th century).
Opposite page, landscape painted on satin by Zhu Da (1626-1705).

FRANÇOIS CHENG,
Chinese-born writer, translator and poet, is professor of Chinese at the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations, Paris. His many publications on the art and poetry of China include *L'écriture poétique chinoise* (1977), *Vide et plein: le langage pictural chinois* (1979), and *L'espace du rêve: mille ans de peinture chinoise* (1980, 1988).

NAHAL TADJADOD,
Iranian Sinologist, is the author of a doctoral thesis on the influence of Buddhism on Chinese Manichaeism *(Mani, le Bouddha de Lumière,* Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1990). She is currently participating in Unesco's Silk Roads Project.

brushstroke has been aided by the existence of calligraphy and by the instantaneous and rhythmical execution of a painting, following a long period of study and rapt attention. Before taking up his brush, the painter must have achieved a mastery of the many types of brushstroke representing the many types of beings or things, with each brushstroke being the result of close observation of nature.

"Before you can paint a bamboo," wrote Su Dongpo (1036-1101), "the bamboo must have grown deep inside you. It is then that, brush in hand, gazing intently, you will see the vision rise up before you. Capture the vision at once by the strokes of your brush, for it may vanish as suddenly as a hare at the approach of the hunter."

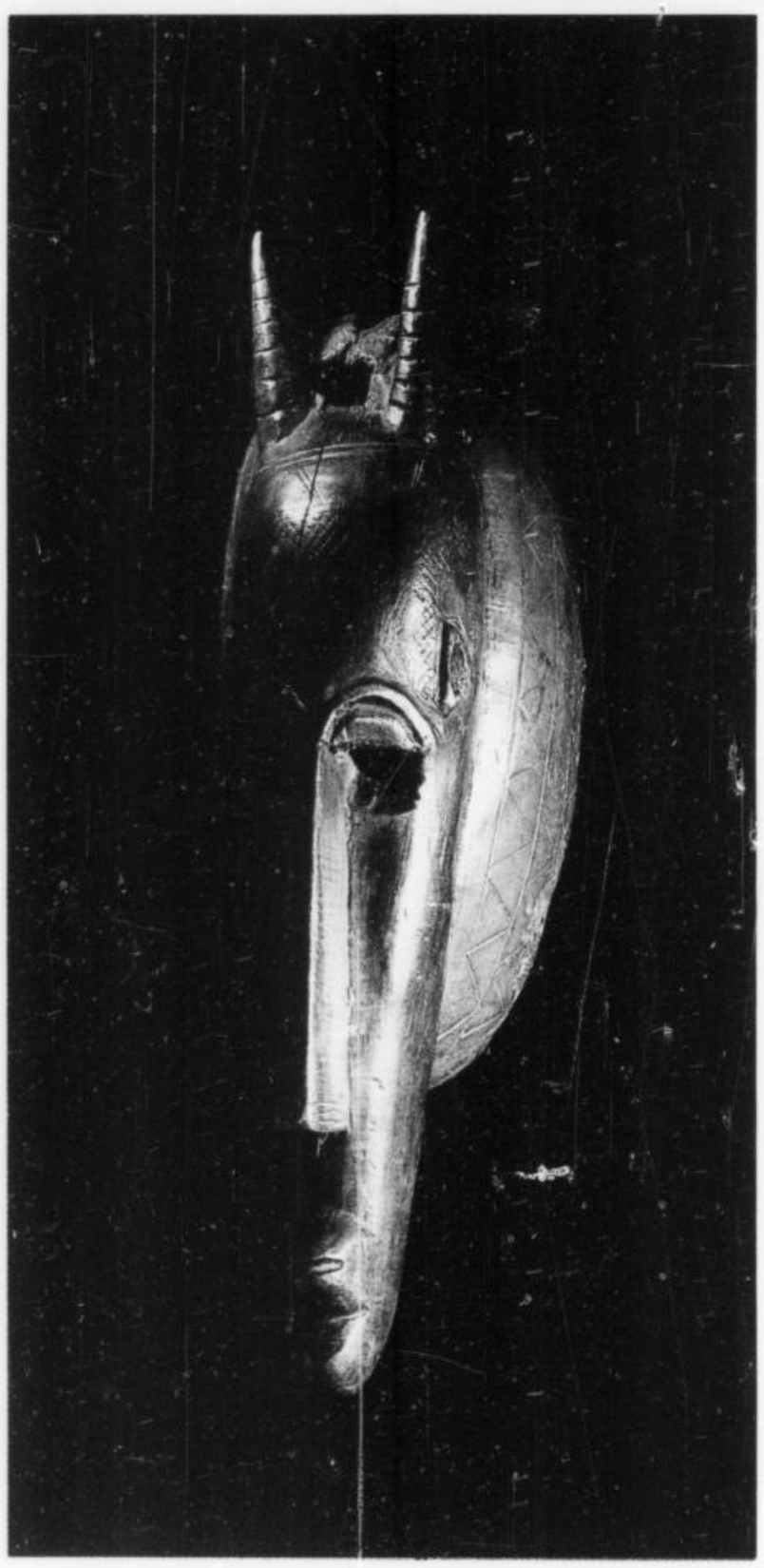
The opposing link that unites the different natural phenomena—mountain and water, trees and rocks, animals and plants—is expressed through the Void, and it is thus that the painter succeeds in recreating the pulsations of an invisible world at the heart of the seen world. Only then can each being enter into communion with all things. Does not legend have it that Wu Tao-tzu (701-792) disappeared into the mist of a landscape that he had just painted?

The completed painting, once rolled up, becomes a universe in itself. Unrolling it (in China, unrolling and gazing upon a masterpiece, hour after hour, is an almost sacred ritual), means each time translating experiential time into a living space. The Void recreates in the heart of the beholder the visual music of the universe. ■

* The former lived in the sixth century BC, the latter at the end of the fourth century BC.

Keys to the spirit world

BY OLA BALOGUN



Above, ceremonial mask of the Marka people of the Niger river, Mali.
Right, Bambara headdress, Mali.
Opposite page, Senufo mask, northern Côte d'Ivoire.

OLA BALOGUN
is a Nigerian writer and film-maker. His recent work includes two documentaries, *River Niger, Black Mother* (1989) and *Children of Africa* (1990).

It may well be, in the final analysis, that art is essentially a means of reconciling the world of forms that surrounds us with our perception of these forms. In this sense, art carries us beyond the kind of cognition that we require for everyday life by providing opportunities to accede to heightened levels of perception and experience.

If this definition of art is correct, then we can perhaps go further to state that in essence, artistic creativity involves the act of opening doors to a level of knowledge and experience that transcends our surface perception of the world around us. It is as if we spent most of our lives groping through a forest of dark objects, which are suddenly illuminated from time to time by the light that is thrown by works of art, or as if the forms and sounds that we are accustomed to in everyday life acquired new depths and dimensions through the transformation of our cognitive abilities by the process of creating or perceiving art.

What doors do African works of art open for us, and how do such doors function? Although there is no single form of art that can be defined as "African art", there are a number of styles and approaches which flow from the creative genius of the peoples of Africa, and which, taken collectively, can be seen to belong to the same family of art. To understand the function of African art, let us take the mask as an example.

Power objects

Where does art end and religion begin? In Africa, masks are not mere carvings. They are "power objects", in the sense that they are a means of access to an invisible world inhabited by the divinities, spirits and ghosts which are held in African cosmogony to share the universe with mankind.

Just as many peoples in other parts of the world have developed a religious iconography to represent the divine, Africans use masks in the course of religious rituals and ceremonies to establish communication between human beings and the spiritual world, which is imperceptible through normal means of cognition. It is impossible to understand the stylistic conventions of carved African masks unless we keep their purpose in mind.

First of all, African masks are not intended to mirror real forms. They are designed to reflect the *essence* of what they stand for. A mask is not a reproduction of an object, but a *sign* that stands in lieu of the invisible. Since it is a sign, the artist may encapsulate in his carving the attributes of the spirit-object that he has set out to represent,

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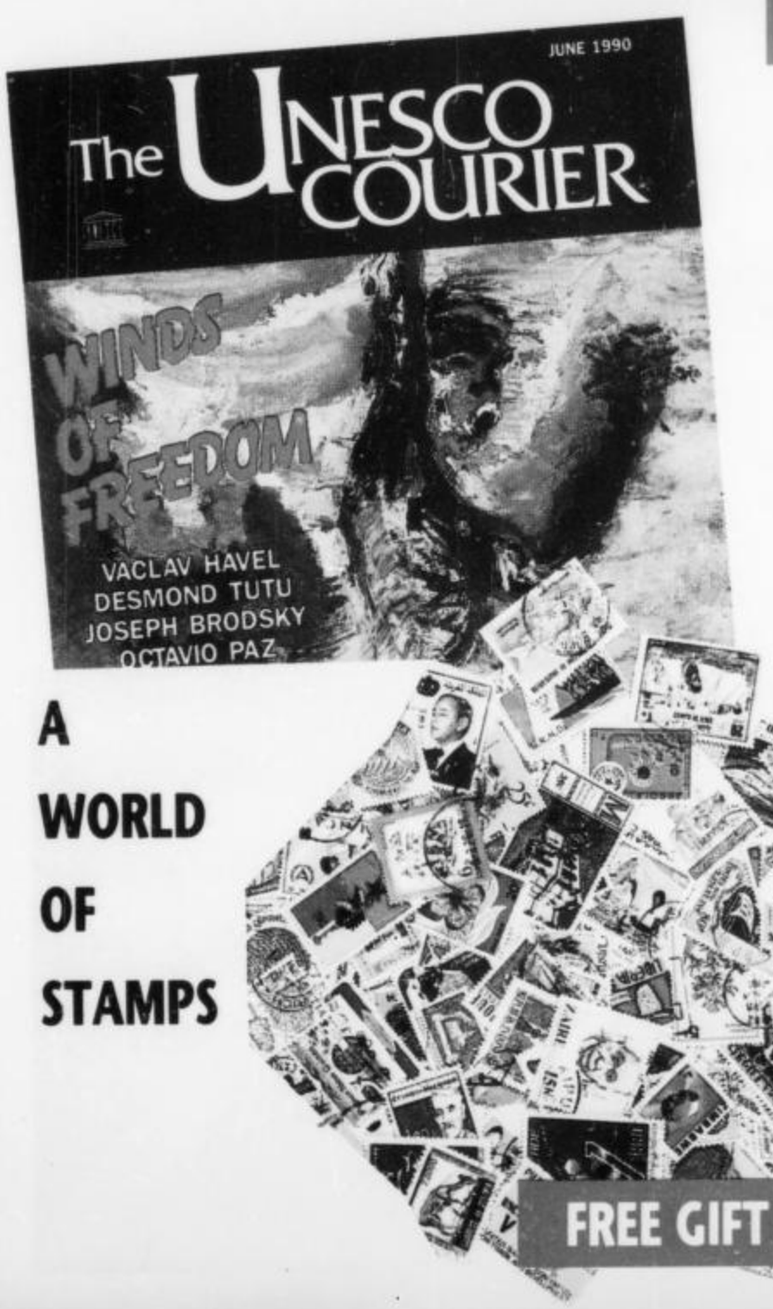

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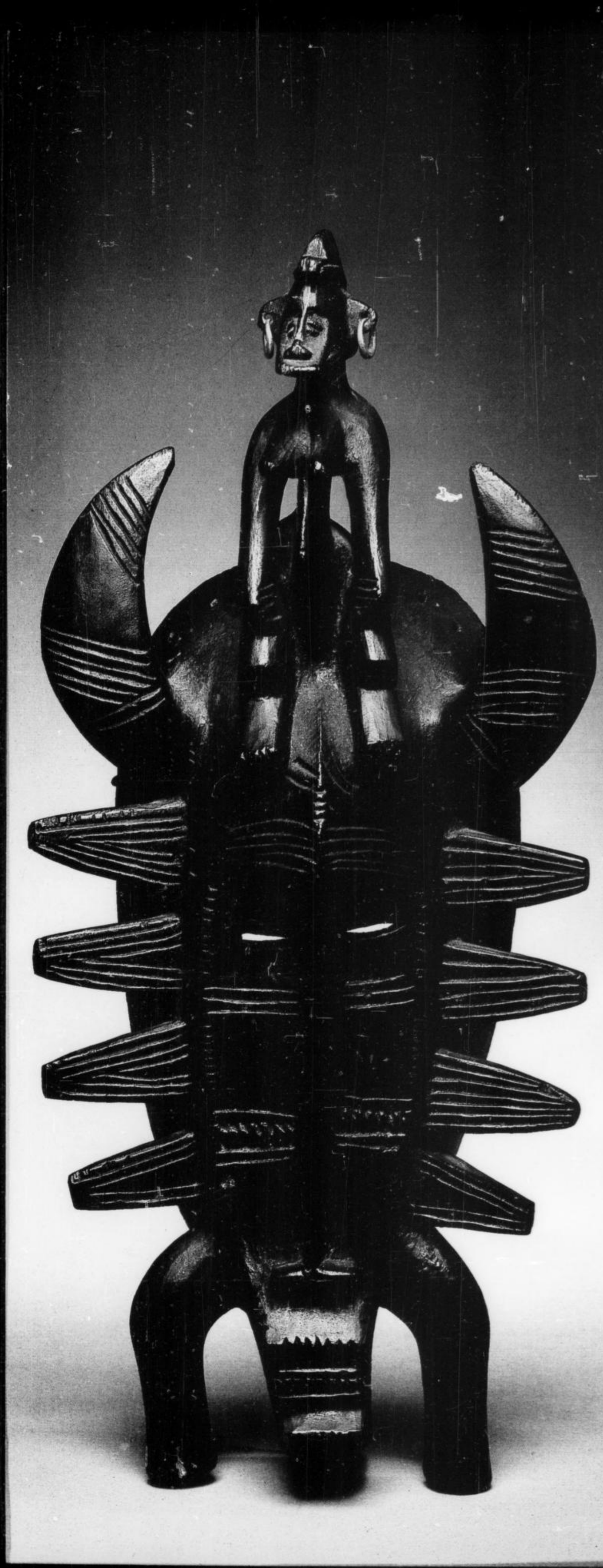


or simply give free reign to his imagination in order to capture the *idea* of the divinity or spirit that is to manifest itself through the mask. Either way, his task is to achieve a kind of abstraction that stands in lieu of an outward form.

At the same time, the mask is a face through which the divinity or the spirit who temporarily inhabits the body of the masquerader looks out on the world. In this face, shapes and forms are often expressed as geometrical relationships. Why should the eyes of the divinity not be triangles that stand in a balanced relationship to a cube that stands for a mouth? Or why should the mask itself not be surmounted by other forms that extend skywards in intricate spirals? And for that matter, why should the face not sit on top of the head, gazing forever skywards, or be replaced by the graceful sweep of a sleek form that represents the spirit of the antelope? Why should the artist's conceptual freedom be limited?

Free expression

Sometimes the mask tells a story, like the Yoruba *gelede* (a secret society) mask that may have sitting atop its helmet-like form a football player with a ball at his feet, or an aeroplane that once caught the eye of the sculptor. Why not? The mask is after all a window into a dream-like world in which many strange things exist side by side. It leads us into the sculptor's imagination, as well as into the age-old artistic and cultural traditions that guide his creativity.

Even though the artistic and cultural heritage from which his work flows is generally well defined, the African mask carver enjoys almost unlimited creative freedom. Even where he seeks to reproduce a pre-existing model that has been enshrined by tradition as the perfect representation of a spirit form, he is still at liberty to add his own variations and flourishes.

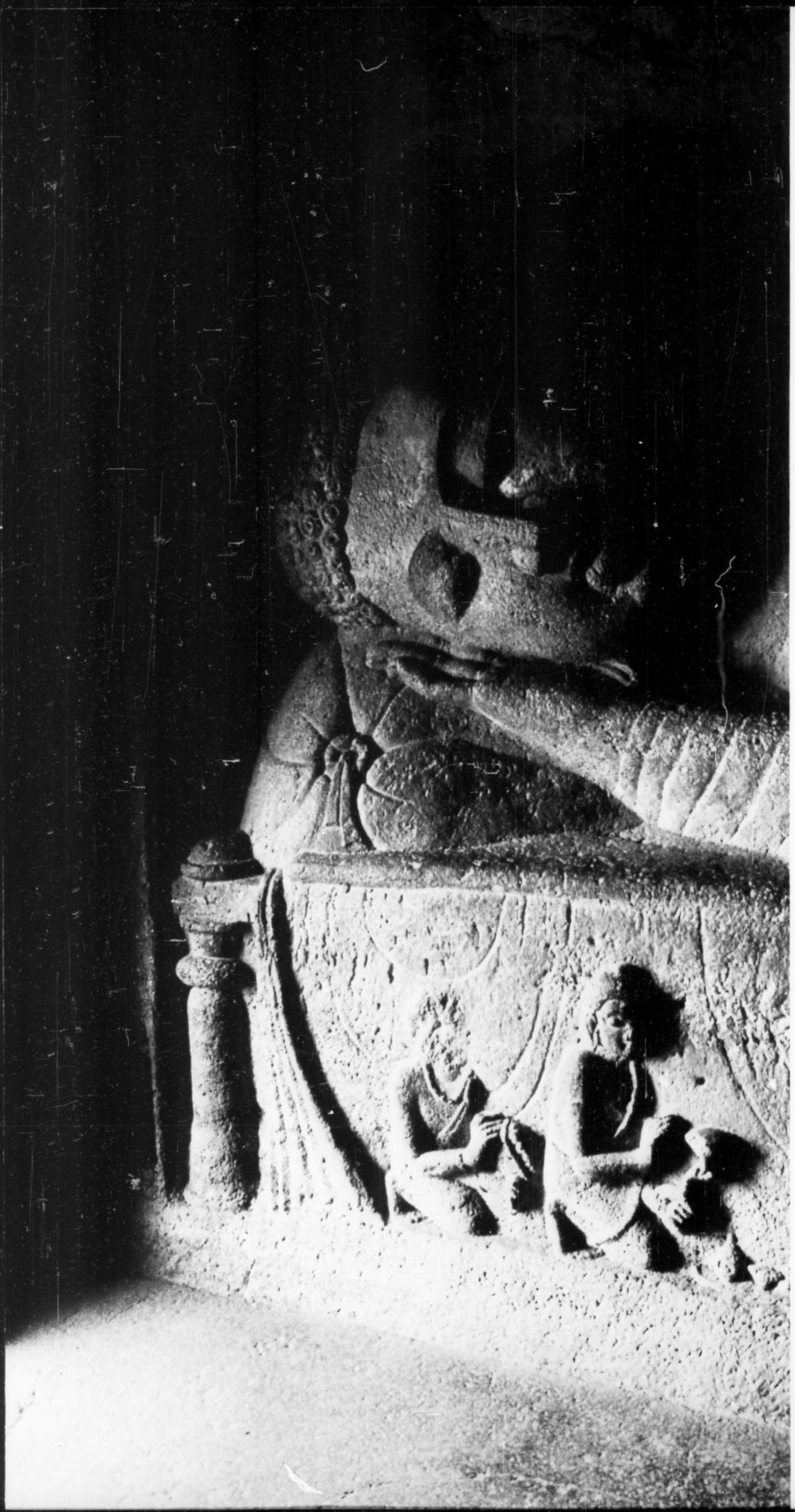
But is this art? Where is beauty to be found in the strange world of abstract forms and signs that is so characteristic of African masks? Traditionally, the African artist is obsessed by the rhythm, balance and harmony of forms. On examining a mask closely, one cannot help being struck by the care and thought that has gone into ensuring that volumes and shapes are symmetrical—when they are not deliberately made to confront each other in patterns contrived to produce a visual shock.

The same conceptual freedom that traditional African sculptors achieve in masks is also found in carvings of decorative or ritual objects. In some sculptures, however, such as the famous bronzes of Ife and Benin, the purpose of the work of art is to provide a faithful reproduction of the forms that surround us. Here art sublimates life in its own way...

Beauty in art is not necessarily dependent on a faithful imitation of nature, an approach that the world has absorbed through exposure to African art.

In the realm of the senses divine

BY
ROMAIN MAITRA



Left, monumental statue of Buddha in a cave sanctuary at Ajanta, India.
Opposite page left: one of the many forms of the protective divinity Mahakala is depicted in this statue of repoussé brass plaques, thought to have been produced in Mongolia around 1800.
Opposite right, female figure carved on a wooden pillar, Nepal, 17th century.

TRADITIONAL Indian art is primarily religious. Everything in it has a divine meaning and no aspect of life is treated for its own sake. People, trees, flowers, birds and other features of the natural world are all depicted in painting and sculpture, but their beauty is not intrinsic, it lies in the divine idea which is impressed on those human minds which are in a suitably receptive state.

The earliest Indian treatise on the theory of the beautiful is the *Natya Shastra,* which was written around the sixth century BC. In it the sage-priest Bharata set forth the important concept of aesthetic flavour or *rasa.* In a famous passage, Bharata says that a *rasa* is a strong and lasting emotion which may be kindled by transitory feelings of pleasure and pain. He describes the main *rasas* which are aroused by the arts as erotic, comic, pathetic, furious, heroic, terrible, odious, and marvellous.

To taste *rasa* the spectator must be in that state of freedom which comes from detachment from the self. His or her mind must be in a pure and balanced state *(sattric).* Egoism and desire must be forsaken before vision and delight are possible. Through glimpsing a divine vision, the real nature of the soul is set free. Unlike the *katharsis* of Greek tragedy, *rasa* does not involve the idea of emotional relief alone. The spectator does not experience the unpleasant or agreeable effects of his or her reactions but resolves them into a blissful state of consciousness.

While the ultimate aesthetic consciousness is purely contemplative, the steps prescribed to achieve it through the artistic process are marked by a high degree of concentration and purity of mind. Aesthetic activity is like a *yoga,* a seeking of truth, a spiritual exercise involving the cultivation of a disinterested feeling. The emotions aroused by a work of art do not belong to any one person, neither to artist, actor or spectator. They have no location in time and space. As Ananda Coomaraswamy has pointed out, "all knowledge and all truth are absolute and infinite, waiting not to be created, but to be found".

When depicting the gods, Indian sculptors and painters did not use the Hellenic models whereby the gods are imagined in human form. They sought to attain their goal through conceptual insight or intuition rather than by observation and analysis of physical features. A deity symbolically represents a unified set of spiritual ideas and his body, therefore, should be regarded as merely a vehicle for the eternal expression of that particular set of spiritual ideas. Thus the many-headed gods and many-armed goddesses of Hindu art represent eternal abstract ideas of beauty and have no exact counterparts in nature.

One ideal of the divine form is based on the ancient notion of the Indian hero, the superman. The *Mahabharata* describes this ideal form as that of a mighty hunter who became invincible after vanquishing the king of beasts in many conflicts and acquired a lion-like body with broad chest and shoulders, long, massive arms, a thick neck, and a very slim waist. In Indian art this leonine body became the symbol of physical strength. Nimbleness, another essential quality for success in the chase, was symbolized by legs like those of a deer or a gazelle, a feature which is prominent in the Buddhist cave-paintings at Ajanta in northern India and in the Buddhist sculptures at Amaravati.

In both Hindu and Buddhist art, gods who had acquired divine powers by ascetic practices are not represented like human ascetics with bodies emaciated by hunger and thirst, with protruding bones and swollen veins. Instead they are portrayed with smooth skin and rounded limbs. Their veins and bones are always concealed, they have strong necks, massive shoulders and narrow waists. Whereas the divinities of the Far East appear to dwell in a fair garden of peace filled with delicate springtime blossoms, the Indian ideal of beauty seems to be set among the celestial solitudes of a Himalayan skyscape hinting at the infinite.

A special feature of the Indian concept of the beautiful is based on the distinction between pleasure and bliss *(ananda),* which is stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* as being at the core of beauty. Pleasure is selfish and individual, phenomenal and relative, whereas bliss is absolute and infinite. Pleasure is transitory, but bliss is unalloyed and related to composure and peace. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* do not end with the vanquishing of the unrighteous and the victory of the righteous. They move on towards the fulfilment of a life after life. The goal is not the attainment of an earthly throne but the attainment of perfection. Sensuality and spirituality seem to be merely the inner and outer aspects of the same life. The Ajanta paintings enchantingly depict a civilization in which the conflict of matter and spirit has been beautifully resolved. ■

ROMAIN MAITRA
is an Indian journalist, writer and cultural anthropologist. He is currently working at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, on a study of the image of the Indian world presented by French film-makers.

The Greek ideal

BY GEORGES DONTAS

THE human figure occupies a central place in Greek art and particularly in Greek sculpture. In the earliest works a diversity of beasts and monsters are depicted, but the range soon narrows to a few domestic animals such as dogs and horses—a trend reflecting the anthropocentrism of Greek thought, history and character.

The Greeks believed profoundly in the value of man. This conviction underlies Aristotle's statement that the city-state is the ideal political institution. For Plato "Man participates in the divine" and is "related to the gods". The great lyric poet Pindar wrote that "Gods and men have a single mother, only our strengths are different". At the dawn of Greek civilization Homer sang of a world where the gods not only mingled with men but—except that they were immortal and all-powerful—felt and behaved like them.

The gods are thus almost always represented in human form. The human body is a constantly recurring motif in Greek art. Soaring temple columns with their finely-chiselled lines recall the slender bodies of Greek youths, and the name for the capital of a column *(kionokranon)* means head. In paintings and sculptured reliefs the beauty of the human form in repose or in action stands out against a neutral background. Only later, during the Hellenistic period, do we find some rather clumsy attempts to represent man in a natural setting.

Human and divine

This anthropomorphism explains the pre-eminence of sculpture, which can render the beauty of the human body more successfully than any other art form. In Plato's *Republic,* when the philosopher Glaucon refers to Socrates' description of the magistrates in his ideal city, he utters this revealing phrase: "My dear Socrates, you have made your magistrates too beautiful, just as if you were a sculptor."

Only by representing in a purely human form the men they honoured, the gods they worshipped and the heroes of their legends could the ancient Greeks understand them and communicate with them, almost as equals.

When, around the middle of the seventh century BC, sculptors first dared to carve stone statues that were life-size or larger, they initially restricted themselves to a small number of human types, always viewed from the front. These types are the *kouros* or young man, naked and standing upright, his arms held close to his sides and his left leg slightly forward; the *kore,* a young woman who is always depicted clothed, her feet together; and the male or female figure seated in a hieratic posture.

All of these types, particularly the *kouroi,* have points in common with Egyptian statues of gods and pharaohs, but there are some notable differences. The *kouros,* unlike his Egyptian prototypes, is never portrayed wearing a garment around his waist or leaning against a pillar, and his legs are not attached by a support. The figure is usually naked, like the Greek athlete on which it is modelled. It seems to be on the verge of movement or action, unlike Egyptian figures which seem fixed for all eternity.

Despite their reserved attitude and their modest demeanour, the faces of the *korai* express great vitality. Many of them are shown smiling

This page, detail of a bronze statue of Athena (4th century BC) found at Piraeus in 1959. Opposite page, marble *kore* of the archaic period (late 6th century BC).

sensually. Their clothing is beautifully draped and painted. They exude the joy of life and the radiant charm of youth. Other human figures carved on votive and even funerary monuments have the same vitality.

The canon of beauty

How did Greek sculptors succeed in rendering this ideal, these figures in the full bloom of youth? Above all through the science of proportions which, until the beginning of the Middle Ages, was considered to be the key to beauty. A detailed description of its principles was given in the fifth century BC by the sculptor Polyclitus in a treatise on his statue the "Doryphorus" (Spearbearer) which was known as the "Canon" because it embodied the ideal proportions of the male form. Although what he says is not always clear, Polyclitus created a system of fixed ratios between the different parts of the body which was taken as a model for several centuries.

Right, Attic amphora in the red-figure style (second half of 5th century BC), from Nola, Italy.
Opposite page left: Roman copy of the "Apollo Sauroctonus" by the Attic sculptor Praxiteles (c. 390-335 BC), in which the god is shown as a boy leaning against a tree trunk.
Opposite page right: detail of a Greek warrior (5th century BC), one of a pair of bronze statues found in the Mediterranean off Riace, Italy, in 1972.

But the use of mathematical proportions in Greek sculpture must date back to much earlier times, probably even earlier than Pythagoras (second half of the sixth century BC) whose doctrines had a great influence on architecture and sculpture as well as on philosophy and political thought. How could monumental sculpture have come into being without the use of an elaborate system of measurement?

The Greeks used Egyptian parameters to create their large stone statues but, always eager to break new ground, they soon began to make their own rules and their own, more realistic, types of figure. Does this mean that naturalism was always a feature of Greek sculpture? Most later theorists, notably Aristotle, have insisted that art imitates nature. But did the word "imitation" mean to the Greeks "a copy from nature" as it does to us? And if it did, when did their concern for naturalism begin and how important is it?

The aim of Greek sculptors, especially during the archaic or pre-classical period, was not to recreate the appearance of nature, but to bring to the surface the very essence of the model and above all to render it dynamically, so that it seems to live. It might be said that the Greek sculptor worked from the inside out. He brought to light the masses of the body as though he himself were creating life, rendering in every detail the harmony of forms. Even during the most naturalistic periods sculptors never attempted to produce photographic likenesses, as in academic art, or cold reflections of abstract forms, as in neoclassicism. Their works vibrate with life which is tempered only by a profound sense of balance and moderation.

This passion for truth led to a constant renewal of means of expression. At the beginning of the fifth century BC there were two major developments. A new pose, the *contrapposto*, appeared. There was also a change in expressivity. The indistinctly human and divine creatures that had been depicted until then now seemed to acquire a specifically human soul.

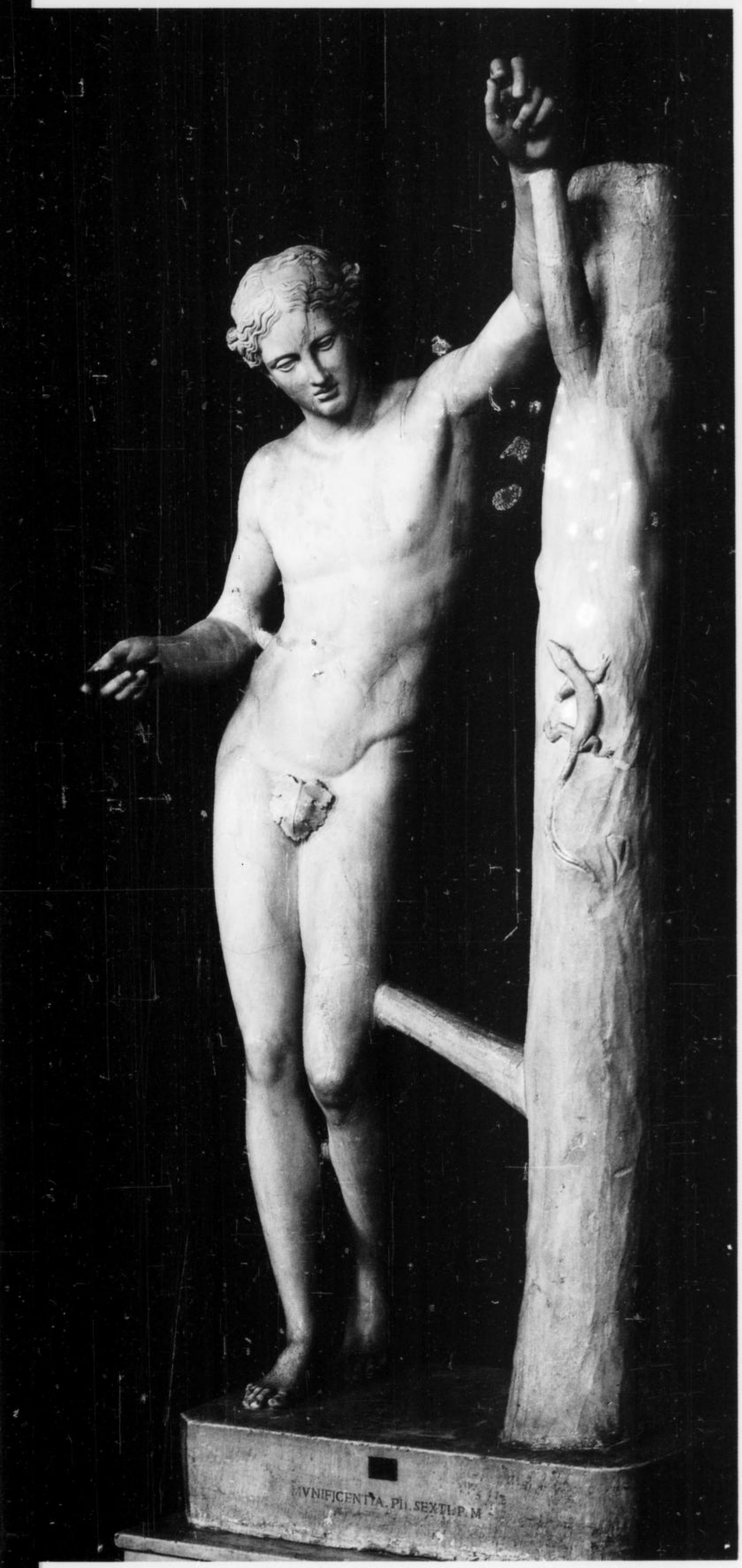
In *contrapposto* the weight of the figure is shifted onto one leg, and the other is bent at the knee. The figure stands at ease, with new suppleness and freedom. The head is turned, the axes change position, and the rhythms vary. Breaking out of its solitude, the statue begins to relate to the space around it.

The smile of the archaic period, with its promise of eternal youth, gives way to a more thoughtful expression. The statue looks inward, addressing its own self and its creator. What it loses in divine perfection, it gains in depth of spiritual meaning and humanity. It is no coincidence that this new departure, which marks the beginning of the classical style, took place in the years when the art of Greek tragedy reached its zenith. In the fourth century BC, this development culminated in the individualized portrayal of the human figure.

The Apollonian and the Dionysian

This increasing concentration on appearance, this fragmentation of truth, was ill received by some artists and philosophers. Though Plato was doubtless less hostile to the plastic arts than some writers have claimed, it is true that he severely criticized the aesthetics of his time. He believed that beauty lies not in the deceptive and illusory appearance that gives pleasure to the eye but in a higher reality, which he called the Idea. He approved only of geometrical forms, pure volumes, and mathematical proportions. He seems to have accepted only works of very ancient Greek and Egyptian art, which he valued for their purity of form and their immutability.

GEORGES DONTAS
is a Greek archaeologist who was formerly director of the Acropolis and the Acropolis Museum and chief curator of Greek antiquities in Athens. A member of several European archaeological institutes, he has published many studies and articles in specialized journals, notably on Greek sculpture and portraiture.



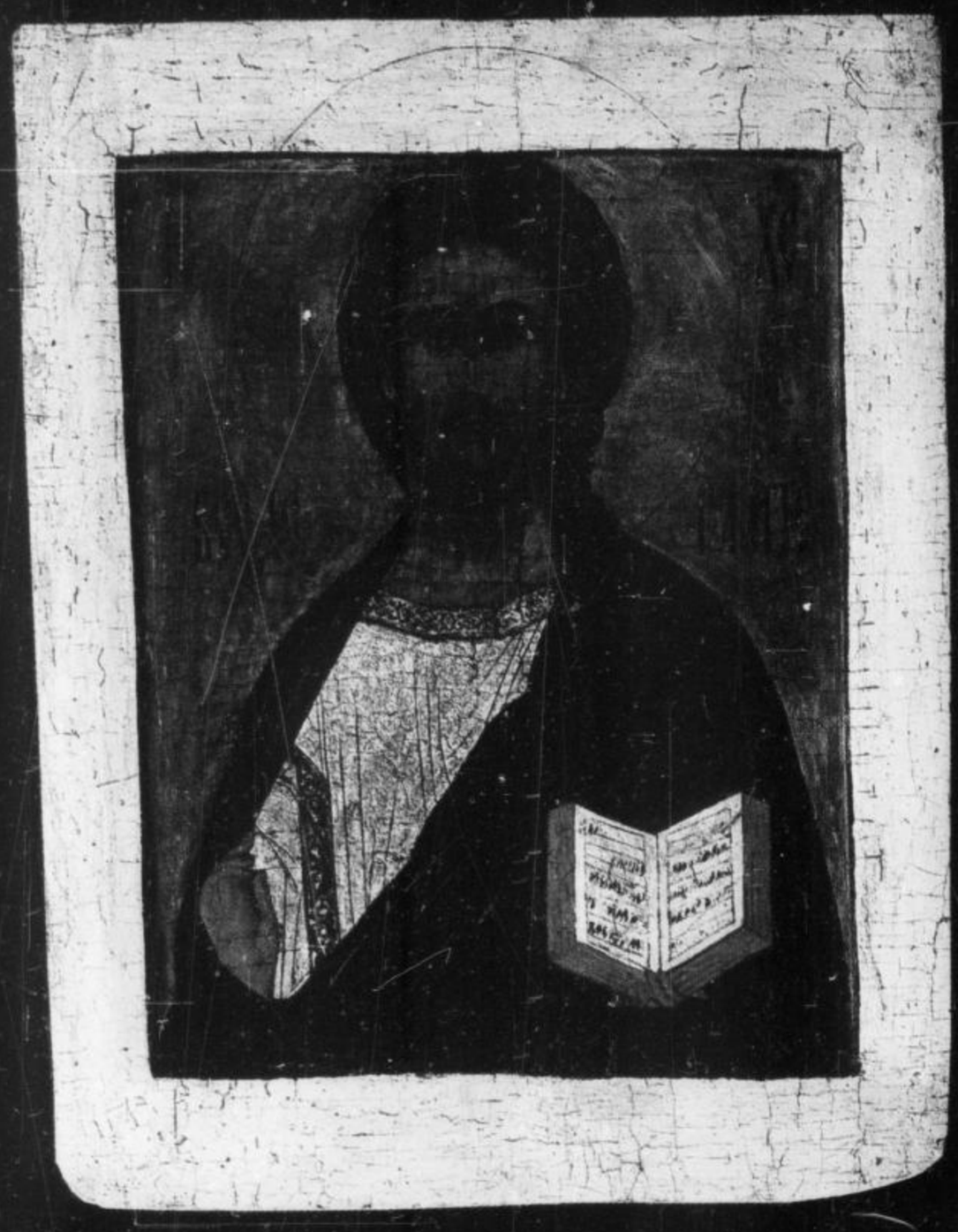
Closer to reality and to the Greek tradition, Aristotle in the fourth century BC found beauty in ideal proportions, symmetry and order. Art for him was merely an imitation of nature; the instinct for imitation being inherent in man. Faithful to the naturalistic ideas of his time, Aristotle remarked that a work of art is a source of pleasure when we recognize in it a familiar object, even if the object is not beautiful in reality. In this he prefigured the modern notion that there is a distinction between artistic beauty and physical beauty.

What then did the Greeks understand by artistic beauty? Was it the mathematical rules and

relations of number which for centuries imposed simple, clear and symmetrical forms and harmonious proportions, as demanded by Polyclitus, the most normative of sculptors, and Plato, the most brilliant of philosophers? Or what Nietzsche called the Apollonian? Or the power of life, the Dionysian force which brings life to the smallest surface, the tiniest detail of a Greek sculpture and makes it a joy to see and touch?

The Greek idea of beauty may well have sprung from the struggle of these two elements clasped in an inextricable embrace. With time, the Apollonian lost ground and the Dionysian gradually triumphed and led to excesses of realism. However, even at the end of its long development, the art of ancient Greece, in spite of its capacity for penetrating the secrets of the human soul and its plastic virtuosity, never went so far as to create a gallery of portraits, a chronicle peopled with figures, as the Romans did. Until the end Greek art was illuminated, however dimly, by the tender and beautiful light which emanated from the Greek idea of the perfect man.

Images and signs



Two different paths in a quest for the Absolute. On the one hand the Orthodox icon, a religious image which expresses the beauty of the spiritual world.

On the other, the calligraphy which has always ranked high in the Islamic arts with their emphasis on the word rather than the figurative.

Theology in colours: the language of icons

BY RICHARD TEMPLE

Above, Christ dressed in the robes of an ancient Greek philosopher. Detail of a 16th-century Russian icon. Opposite page left: Christ Pantocrator. Russian icon, 16th century. Opposite page right: "Know thyself", calligraphic design by Hassan Massoudy.

THE conversion of the Slavs in 988 AD brought Byzantine culture as well as Christianity to Russian lands. And Byzantium in its turn had been, through Alexandria, the heir to Graeco-Roman civilization. Thus it can be said that medieval icons—the product of early Christian and Byzantine art—appear at the end of an unbroken line rooted in classical traditions.

Because of this it has been said that Byzantine art was in a state of permanent renaissance, always turning towards classical ideals in order to solve its aesthetic problems. We can see aspects of this tradition in icons which depict Christ and the apostles dressed in the robes of philosophers of ancient Greece, and in others which show evangelists in the pose, the architectural setting and even the clothes in which classical authors had been depicted. When we look beyond the dream-like and fantastic architecture in Russian icons, we can distinguish the forms of Greek colonnades, pediments or atriums.

Built as it was on early Christian and Hellenistic foundations, medieval Byzantine and Russian art thus embraced principles of form, proportion, symbolism and colour that go back to the great treasure houses of ancient knowledge. This knowledge was the essential source of energy of Christian culture and provided the wealth of thought and beauty that nourished the living tradition of icon painting for over a thousand years.

This knowledge postulated certain universal principles about God, or the Absolute, about the world and Creation, and about man. It was complemented by a body of philosophical and religious teaching which was at first communicated orally and later expressed in books and in various forms of religious art, including architecture and painting. At the highest level, the art of imagery—iconography—is a vehicle for philosophical and theological ideas. It is in this sense that icons have been defined as "theology in colours".

Beauty in icons has to be seen in this perspective. Medieval artists had no conception of beauty for its own sake, which is a Romantic idea dating from the early nineteenth century. For them, as for the artists of Antiquity, beauty was an attribute of the Good, which was Plato's name for one of the highest realms of the universe.

Christians, who inherited the Platonic view of the cosmos, described the realm of the Good as that of the "Heavenly Powers and Principalities". The teaching behind religion and philosophy, which can be found in the symbolic imagery of sacred literature and also in icons, is aimed at bringing the divine Good down to man on Earth and at the same time raising man to the level of the Good.

For some, the purest expression of these ideas was given by Christ to his immediate followers, without the help of books or images. His message was intended to help humanity pass through the crisis of the collapse of Graeco-Roman civilization and to usher in a new era. Orthodox Christianity takes from Greek philosophy the view of the universe as what the sixth-century monk St. John Climacus called a "ladder of divine ascent". According to this view, the cosmos is a hierarchy with God at the highest point. He is the *Pantocrator*, the Ruler of the Universe; Earth is far below, in the shadow, threatened by Death, by Satan and darkness. Man stands on Earth. His physical body is held there but, because of the spark of divine fire in his soul, he yearns to ascend towards the angels and archangels, the starry firmament, the powers and principalities of the divine world where he rightly belongs.

A spiritual voyage

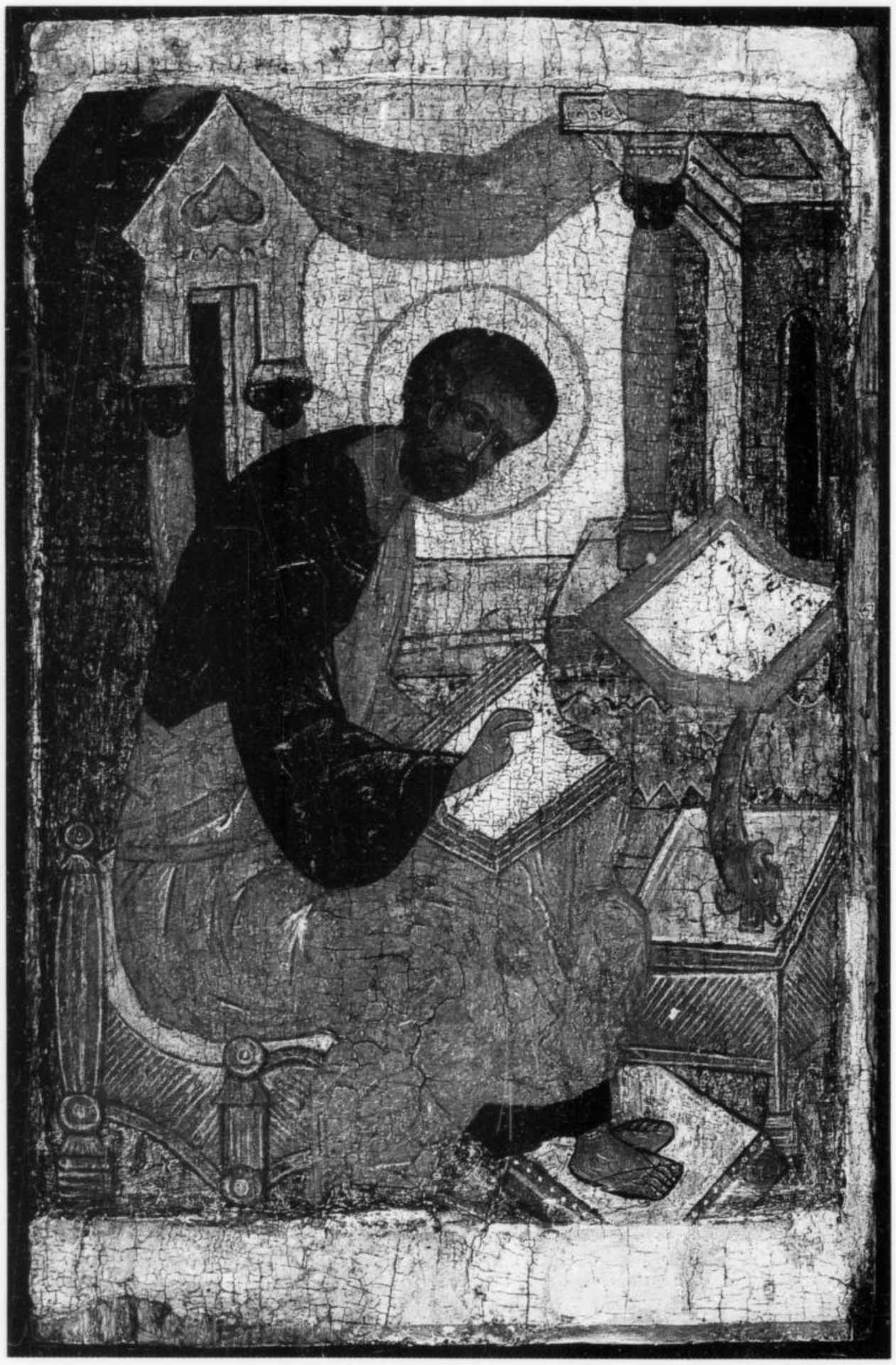
According to mystical tradition the idea that man is "made in the image of God" means that we carry the universe within ourselves. The life of the soul can be understood as an inner journey that takes place, not in the three-dimensional world and in time, but in the spiritual universe within us.

In the Middle Ages the imagery of icons served to illustrate some of the key events that man must inevitably encounter in his spiritual life. Christ said that we must be "reborn of the spirit", and the events described in the Gospels and illustrated in icons can be understood in terms of the spiritual world. The image of the Nativity, in which a ray of light descends from

the higher world and illuminates the dark cave of the lower world into which Christ is born, is therefore not so much a literal description of an historical event as a commentary on the meaning of spiritual birth.

Icons are best understood as abstract rather than pictorial art, as psychological images speaking through symbolism and allegory. Time does not exist in icons and is replaced by eternity. In the same way space is not limited to the three dimensions of our ordinary world. Icons take us to a world of many more dimensions than our physical senses can perceive.

All icons are diagrams of the universe. Whether we understand by this the universe outside ourselves (the macrocosmos) or the universe within us (the microcosmos), the symbols have the same value. God and the world of the Absolute are expressed by a hand extending from the circle in the upper part of the icon; the firmament or celestial world by a plain gold background; the angelic or spirit world by winged angels; man (signifying the soul) by Christ and



the saints ascending and descending, or by warriors struggling with the forces of the lower world.

From the icon Christ gazes deeply into the soul of the onlooker with a compelling and personal regard. Within the nimbus around His head are letters meaning "I AM". This is an appeal to what lies most deeply within us. Christ does not address the thoughts and feelings of our outer selves; He calls to the hidden, inner self.

The asceticism of the icon painter

Plato's idea of Truth, Goodness and Beauty as equivalent concepts representing the highest ideal can be used to help us assess the quality of icons. If the universe created by God has order, proportion, harmony and balance, and if these are the product of Truth, Goodness and Beauty, then all these qualities must be found in works of art that celebrate God's Creation. Such works of art will manifest beauty, as well as goodness and truth, because they are themselves part of that creative process and conform to its laws.

Icons are works of art of this kind when they are painted by a man who has by an inward ascent found divine order within himself. This can only be achieved through scrupulous spiritual discipline. The person must train himself to concentrate exclusively on contemplation, prayer and inner silence and never let himself be distracted by idle thoughts and day dreaming. He must achieve complete self mastery through what the monks on Mount Athos called "voluntary suffering". This self training gives inner power and purity which provide the psychic strength that brings a man or a woman nearer to the divine light.

Right, the Nativity. Russian icon, 16th century.
Opposite page above: the Annunciation, Russian icon, c. 1500.
Opposite page below: St. Mark the Evangelist depicted as in portraits of pre-Christian writers. Russian icon, 16th century.

Such a person aims to establish permanent contact with the higher self, or at least the ability to concentrate himself there when necessary. If he becomes an icon painter, his art is bound to express beauty, as well as truth and goodness, because these qualities will be reflected in everything he does, just as the presence of light dispels shadow.

The law governing the effect of light on darkness applies equally to the spiritual and to the physical world. It is the same law with two aspects, one visible and sensory, the other invisible and psychic. Icon painters could use this principle to illustrate the invisible in terms of the visible. This accounts for what otherwise seems illogical in the icon. For example, the absence of shadows indicates a luminous world where God is present and therefore there can be no outside source of light. The beings depicted are themselves sources of light.

Icon painters inherited from Hellenistic philosophy the idea that the world was created by the entry of spirit into matter, and they believed that light was primarily spiritual. They also understood that its component elements are colour. Knowing that the law of spirit and matter operates at all levels, they could demonstrate by their use of colour the descent of the Divine Spirit into the world of humanity. Their art was a physical celebration of this divine manifestation, both in the cosmos and in themselves.

When looking at icons today, we may be reminded that this incarnation—the birth of Christ within man—is still a possibility. ■

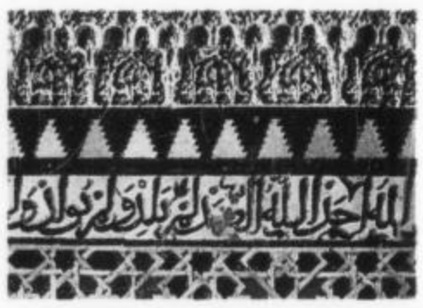
RICHARD TEMPLE
is a British specialist on icons and their restoration. The director of the Temple Gallery in London, he is the author of *Icons and the Mystical Origins of Christianity* (Element Books, Longmead, UK, 1990).

Making words dance: a calligrapher's testimony

BY HASSAN MASSOUDY

KUFIC, one of the great traditional styles of Arabic script, is formal, angular and dignified. But when it is traced on vellum in translucent sepia ink, it acquires a mysterious sensuousness, while losing none of its majesty.

Over the ages, Arab-Muslim calligraphy gained in subtlety and beauty from its encounters with many different cultures. Although the underlying geometry did not disappear, curved script finally prevailed and the letters became distended, arched or rounded. Some letters branched out so much that they transformed the walls on which they were inscribed into gardens of delight through which the eye was led along a voluptuous path between downstrokes and upstrokes. Other letters were adorned with decorative motifs which counterbalanced empty surfaces. Where strict geometry prevailed, colours such as the warm blue or turquoise of ancient ceramics that still enchant us today were used to soften excessive rigour. The quest for beauty was centred entirely on the word, because figurative imagery was disallowed.



Above, details of calligraphic sculpture on the walls of the Alhambra, Granada (Spain), 14th century.
Right, *Hymn to Joy* (1987), painting on paper by the Moroccan artist Mehdi Qotbi.

Working on wood, leather and bone, and later on parchment, stone, glazed brick and other surfaces, generations of calligraphers enriched their art and transmitted their skills orally to apprentices who respected the old traditions.

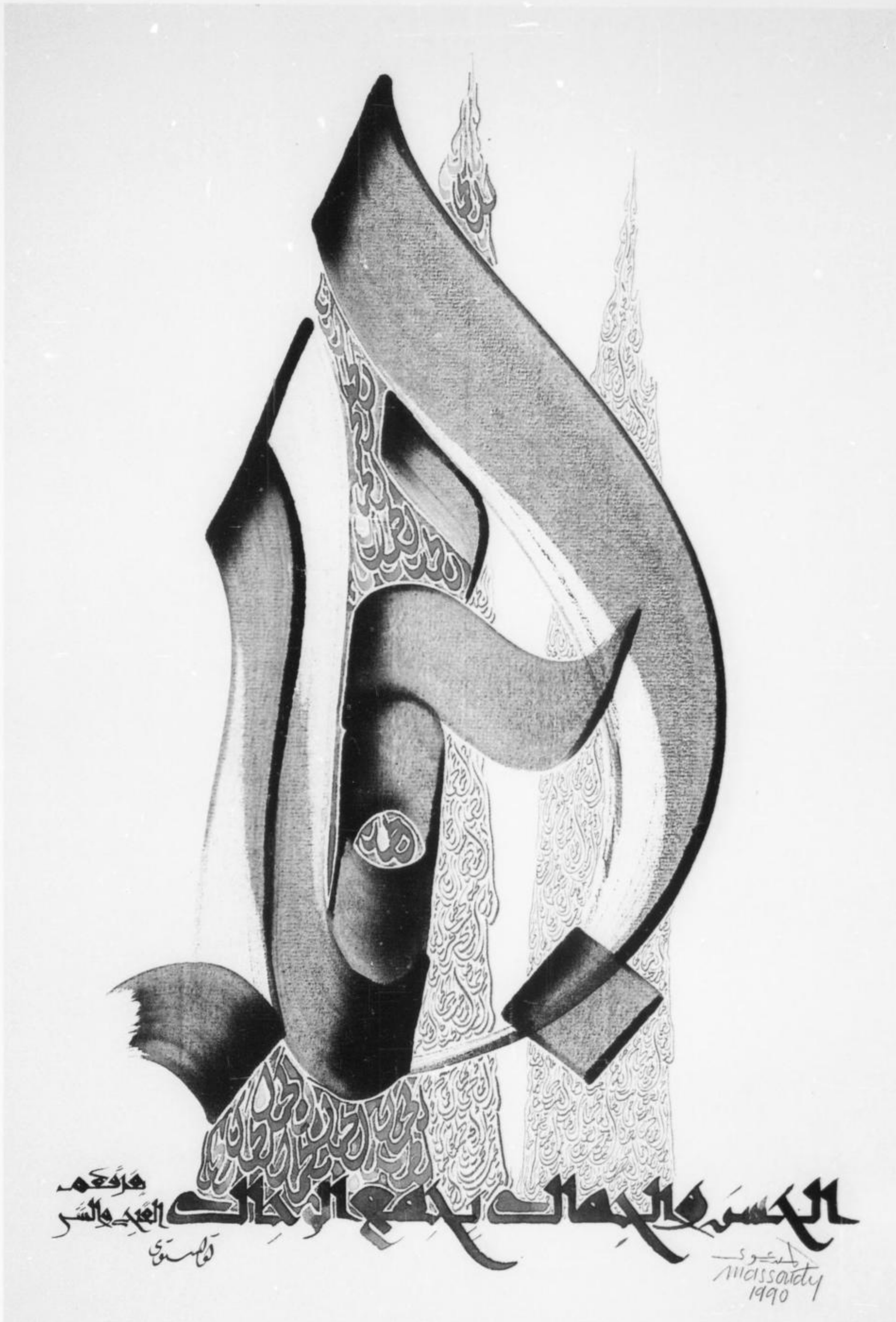
How do things stand today? Aesthetic values are not immutable. Just as attitudes to time and distance have changed beyond measure—think of the abyss that separates the cities and caravans of Antiquity from our age of interplanetary exploration—so the scope of creativity has expanded. Sign and image have been reunited, but in an anarchic proliferation which must be mastered, just as techniques for using the new, synthetic colours must be learned.

In these conditions, how can modern calligraphers express themselves and remain faithful to the lights of inner truth and profound experience that guide them, and without forgetting the tradition they have inherited? How can they renew their art without betraying it? It seems to me that they must do two things. The first concerns the content of the phrases they wish to transcribe. The second concerns their choice of instruments. Content and form are inseparable.

Traditionally the Arab calligrapher has always worked with a calamus, a trimmed reed pen no thicker than a finger. For large-scale inscriptions such as those intended for the decoration of panels or walls, the outline of the letters must first be traced and then filled in with colour, using a brush. If broader instruments are used, either on their own or with the calamus, the ancient signs can be given a new lease of life.

I make my own calligrapher's tools from wood, cardboard and other materials. I also use brushes. The signs I trace with these instruments are still recognizable for what they are, but their appearance is profoundly modified. As a Chinese calligrapher once put it: "When the idea is at the tip of the brush, there's no need to look any further."

Calligraphy is an art form governed by strict rules, and the time it takes to transcribe a line



"Beauty and goodness unite men, evil and ugliness divide them" (Tolstoy). Calligraphic design by Hassan Massoudy, 1990.

onto an empty page is no exception. Traditionally calligraphers had neither the freedom nor the technical means to dawdle or to hurry. Today I write ten times faster than I once did. My hand moves rapidly across the page, tracing simultaneously the outline of the words and the shape of the composition. Not only my hand but my whole body is engaged in this act that unlocks a treasure-house of patiently acquired skills. To write quickly a calligrapher must have absolute control over movement and breathing alike.

Colours are prepared just before one starts to write. Pigments and binding agents are blended with varying degrees of thickness. Colour should be elegant, flow with perfect ease and illuminate the act of writing. Its translucence reflects a smooth, sensual world that radiates calm and serenity. To achieve such control, the substances from which the colour is made must be tamed.

When the relation between form and colour is harmonious, calligraphy is a joy to behold. As for the act of composition, it is a mirror of my feelings as I write. Form, whether extroverted or introverted, is always linked to a moment of

HASSAN MASSOUDY
is an Iraqi-born calligrapher who has since 1969 been based in France, where he has organized a number of exhibitions, courses and workshops on both Roman and Arabic calligraphy. His publications include "Living Arabic Calligraphy" (Flammarion, Paris, 1981 & 1986), "The Poet of the Antara Desert" (Syros, Paris, 1989), and "Calligraphy for Beginners" (EDIFRA/IMA, Paris, 1990).

experience from which it derives intensity. I believe that beauty can originate from this match between what I write and what I am.

At the heart of the composition throbs an autonomous world, a field of energy subjected to the rhythm that I impose on the movement of the letters. Sometimes the strokes are traced upward, as if they are about to take flight; at other moments they settle demurely, as if at rest.

If the form is as it should be, if the strokes flow confidently, then the artist is content. Calligraphy becomes a language of the body, explaining what surges inexplicably from deep within the writer—childhood memories or more recent experiences. These dream-images are marshalled into shape, they unfold as the leaves unfurl when the seed becomes a tree. The calligrapher must guide and direct these sparks of life. The image of sap rising from branch to branch comes to mind, and that of a group of dancers obeying a choreographer's command. I should like to be the choreographer of my letters and make them dance across the white page. I translate what I feel into gestures, and suddenly my reverie is visible. But how much patient groundwork has to be done! How much concentration is needed to capture this impulse in full flight!

I elongate some letters and compress others; I soften verticals and flatten curves. When my letters take flight, I fly with them too. When they come back to earth, so do I. Sometimes chance lends a hand, helping me delve more deeply into my intuitions. In calligraphy, beauty is not always necessarily triumphant or voluptuous. It can also result from conflict or drama. For balance to be restored, the calligrapher must work with great precision. Then beauty becomes a help in troubled times. In creative moments, everything is illuminated, everything becomes calligraphy: nature, humanity, even the industrial world.

Form derives its energy from the place accorded to it in space. Words, in Arabic, are written horizontally—but I give them verticality and, at the summit of the constructions which result, I draw the letters together to enhance the monumental quality of the composition.

In the past calligraphers wished only to reveal the sublime, and even the slightest hint of inner conflict was excluded from their work. Today I can express whatever I wish, but with a liberty that is mature, a desire that is tempered by a grain of wisdom. The apprenticeship is long, and the exercise is perilous. But in the end calligraphy always rewards the patient and devoted practitioner.

The artist to whom calligraphy yields its secrets experiences a sense of exaltation comparable to that felt by dancers who whirl until they are exhausted. All the storms that trouble the heart are transformed into simple and pure gestures. Vaster than the language in which it is written, the calligrapher's work resembles the natural sculptures that stand out against the desert sky and lead the eye towards infinity. ■

IN

MODERN TIMES

THERE

HAS BEEN

A REVOLUTION

IN IDEAS

ABOUT BEAUTY,

ART AND

ARTISTS

THE ORIGINS OF AESTHETICS

BY LUC FERRY

In everyday language aesthetics is roughly equivalent to the philosophy of art or the theory of the beautiful, and people are apt to think that these expressions denote a human preoccupation so basic that in one form or another it must always have existed in every culture. But (as so often happens) the general opinion is misleading: aesthetics proper is a recent discipline, born of a real revolution in our perception of the phenomenon of beauty.

The first book to bear the title "Aesthetics" appeared in 1750. This was the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Aesthetica,* which was itself made possible as the result of a twofold upheaval in the position of art, from the points of view of the artist and of the onlooker.

Let us deal first with the artist's side. In bygone civilizations works of art fulfilled a sacred purpose. As recently as in ancient Greece their function was to reflect a cosmic order entirely external to mankind. By virtue of this externality,

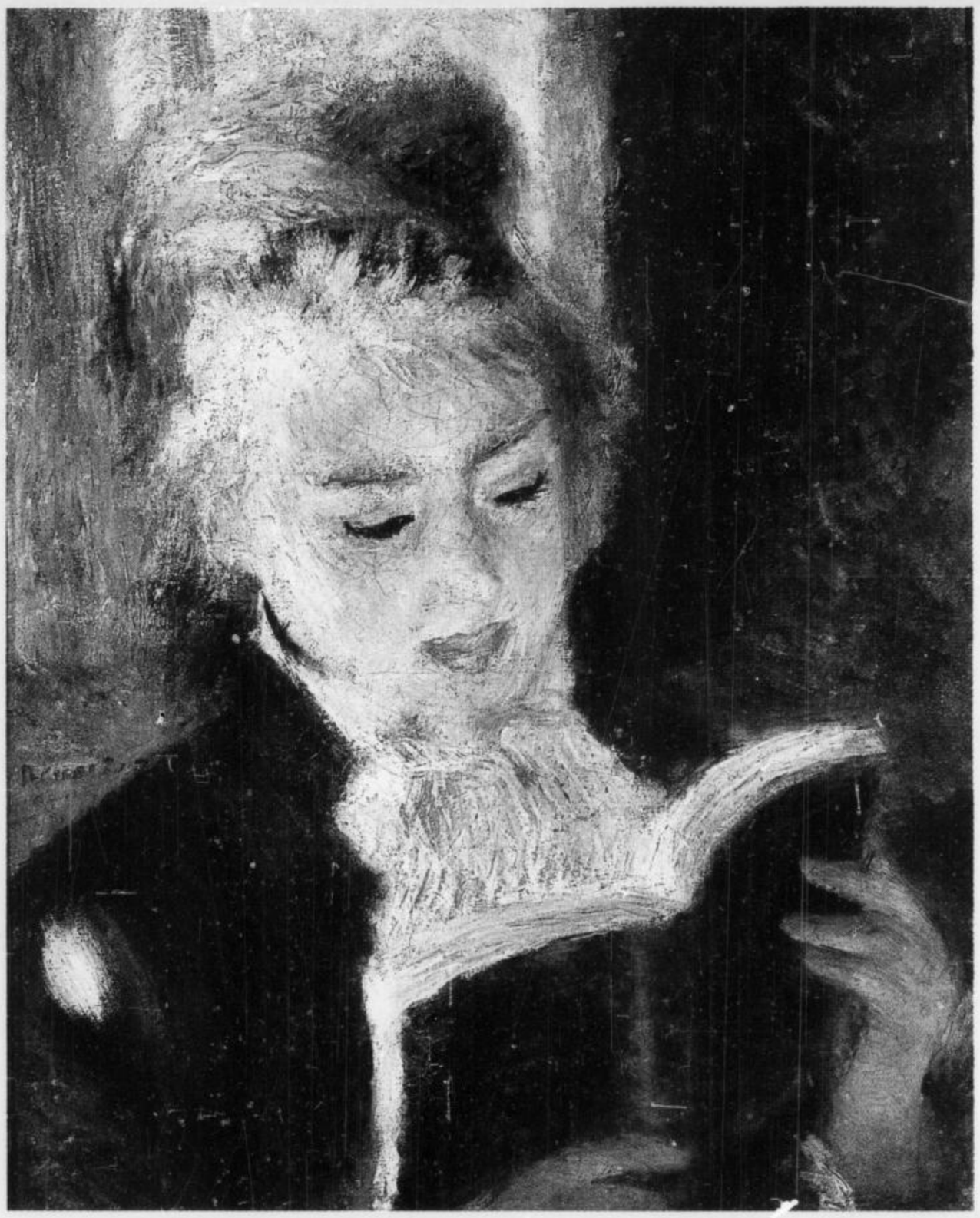
Left, detail of *The Annunciation* (c. 1430), by the Italian painter Fra Angelico. Below, *Child with Top* (c. 1738), by the French painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin.

given that the divine is essentially whatever eludes and transcends humanity, they acquired a semi-religious dimension. They were microcosms (etymologically "little worlds") supposedly representing in miniature the harmonious properties of everything the ancients called "Cosmos". It was this that gave them their "impressive greatness"—their ability actually to impress people, who accepted them as phenomena from without.

In this context works of art had "objectivity". They expressed not so much an architect's or sculptor's genius as divine reality, which they apprehended in their capacity as modest rhapsodists. We are still so conscious of this that it does not really matter very much to us who carved a given statue or bas-relief, any more than it would occur to us to look behind the Egyptian cats in the British Museum for the artist's name. What matters is that they are sacred animals, transfigured as such in the realm of art.

The modern image of the artist

Our attitude to works of art has changed radically. In some ways it has actually done a U-turn, in the sense that we may well be acquainted with the names of creative artists, and even with some aspects of their lives, and yet know nothing about their work. The French composer Pierre Boulez is admired as an intelligent, cultured man who appears on television, but apart from a tiny élite made up largely of professional musicians, who has heard his latest composition, *Répons?* Even



Above, *Girl Reading* (1875-1876), by the French painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir.
Below, *By the Waters*, watercolour by the French painter Gustave Moreau (1826-1898).

LUC FERRY,
French philosopher, is a professor at the University of Caen. His published works include *La pensée 68* (Gallimard, Paris, 1985), which has been translated into several languages, and *Homo Aestheticus: l'invention du goût à l'âge démocratique* (Grasset, Paris, 1990).

in less extreme cases, what Nietzsche predicted in the nineteenth century has become the rule in modern democratic societies. Works of art are no longer portrayals of the world but consummate expressions of an artist's personality—in short, highly elaborate visiting-cards. The overwhelming majority of avant-garde works of art in the major museums of New York, London and Paris are like traces left by strokes of genius, in which we may detect Duchamp's sense of humour, Stella's imaginativeness and Hartung's violence—character traits rather than a representation of a shared world.

Be that as it may, this revolution in attitudes to artists contains the seeds of the avant-garde ideology that was so profoundly to affect contemporary art. Admittedly there were "artists" in pre-democratic societies, but they were not "geniuses", if by that we mean creators *ex nihilo* capable of finding within themselves all the sources of their inspiration. The artist of Antiquity was not so much a true demiurge as an intermediary between man and the gods.

By reaction it is understandable that the requirement of radical innovation and originality that goes with the modern image of an artist should be inseparable from the tabula rasa ideology so clearly expressed in the concept of the avant-garde. The beautiful must not be discovered as though it already existed in the objective world, but *invented:* and thereafter every moment of innovation will find a place in a history of art (embodied at institutional level in a museum).

The crisis now affecting the avant-gardes can be understood only in the context of this history of subjectivity. It stems in essence from the inner contradiction inherent in the notion of absolute innovation. As the Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz has convincingly shown, the act of breaking with tradition and creating something new has itself become traditional in the late twentieth century. The signs of subversion that punctuated the history of the avant-garde no longer surprise us. They are by now so banal and commonplace that they have themselves become museum pieces on a level with the most orthodox works of art.

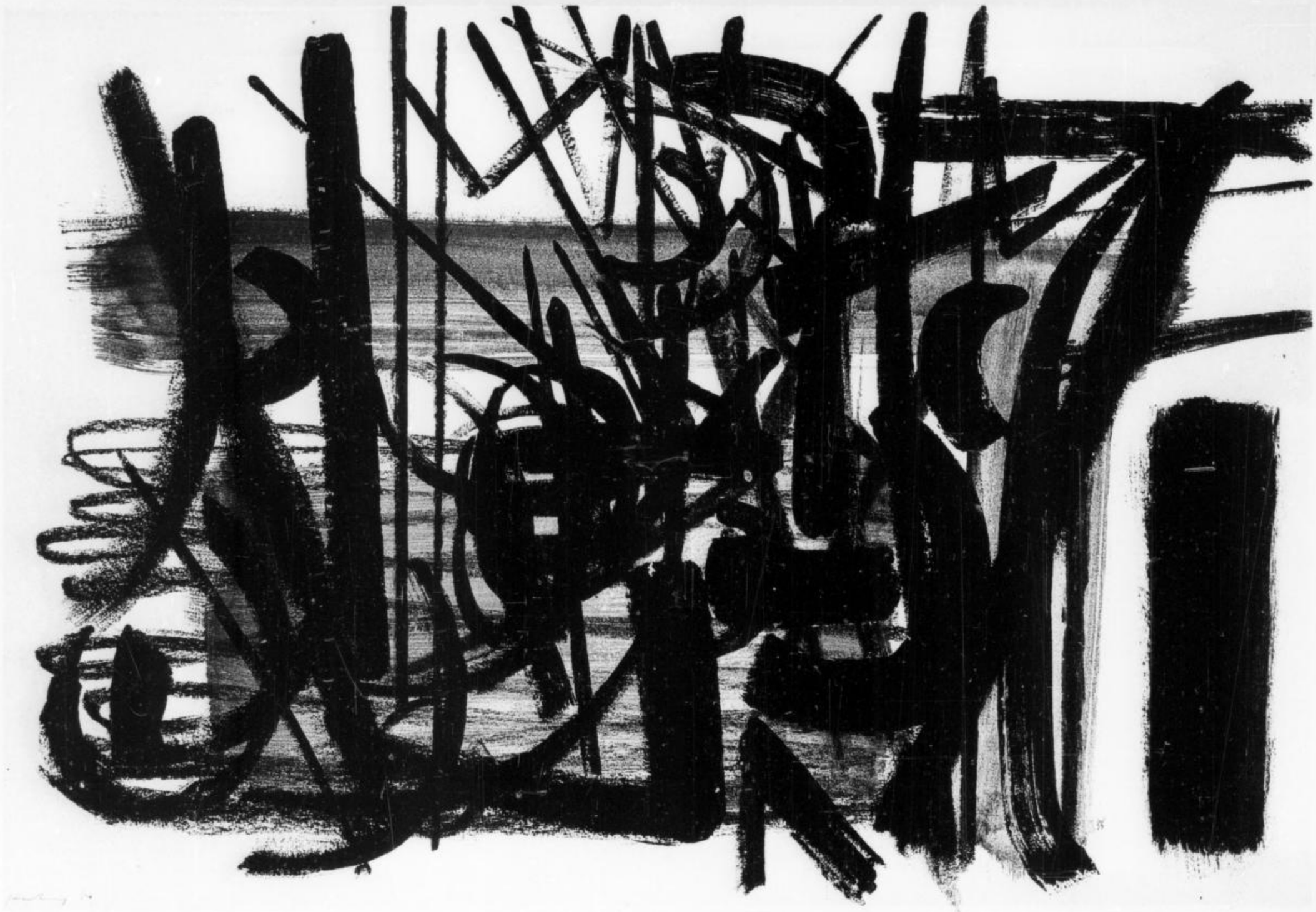
The triumph of sensibility

So much for the change on the artist's side. The corresponding change on the onlooker's side has to do with the notion of *taste.* This term was apparently first used, at any rate in the metaphorical sense, in the works of the seventeenth-century Spanish philosopher Baltasar Gracián to denote man's entirely *subjective* ability to distinguish the beautiful from the ugly: i.e. (unlike the situation in the ancient world) the beautiful no longer denotes a quality or set of properties belonging *intrinsically* to certain objects. As the early treatises on aesthetics emphasize, beauty is *subjective;* it resides essentially in whatever gratifies our taste or *sensibility.*

Hence what was to become the central problem of modern aesthetics, the question of *criteria.* If beauty is subjective, if it is (as we say) a matter of taste or sensibility, how then are we to explain the consensus that exists about so-called "great" works of art? How does it come about that some artists, against all expectation, become "classics" even beyond their own centuries and cultures? Once these questions are posed we slide effortlessly into the orbit of modern aesthetics.

***Self-Portrait in Front of an Easel* (early 1888), by the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh.**

Obviously this account of the origins of aesthetics is primarily valid only for the European sphere and areas directly conditioned by it. Nowadays people are searching for a definition of Europe. It could of course be said to be the continent of Christian nations, and that is obviously not false. I would prefer to define Europe as the realm of secularity, not because it supposedly rejects the wearing of this or that item of clerical attire, but because it put an end to the



***Composition* (1950), oil on paper mounted on canvas, by the German-born French painter Hans Hartung.**

era of theological politics. The symbols of this are the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen and, more importantly, the institution of the National Assembly. Secularity means essentially a new relationship with the law, starting with the fact that it stems no longer from cosmic or divine sources but (for better or worse) from *human* ones which are, in theory if not in practice, within the volition of individuals.

The theme of the ending of theological politics lies at the heart of all modern political philosophy. From Hegel to Heidegger and from de Tocqueville to Weber, David Friedrich Strauss, Hannah Arendt and Louis Dumont, everything (or virtually everything) has been said about theories of the social contract, the birth of humanism and the decline of religion in democratic societies. Less attention has been paid to the ending of what might be called theological ethics, the derivation of standards and laws from a realm external to man.

Art on a human scale

But it is no exaggeration to say that the erosion of *theological culture* still largely remains to be worked out. The debates we have been witnessing since the demise of Marxism are often between the "optimists" who regard modernity as a slow but inescapable process of emancipation from tradition, and the "pessimists" who are more inclined to see it as what might be called a logic of "decline". In many respects these arguments are symptomatic of a change in the position of a culture which in modern times has essentially assumed the shape of *aesthetics*.

It would be absurd, all the same, to use the word decline. Value judgements are inappropriate when it is a matter, first, of understanding something that exists. But it would be equally pointless to disregard a radical change whose origin goes back to the invention of modern aesthetics, with its necessary corollary, the artist's primacy over the world. In our democratic secular world, with its ever-growing insistence on autonomy, exception tends to be taken to any reference to things external to mankind, and perhaps we should be glad of this. But in such circumstances it is only to be expected that art should also have surrendered to the requirement to be "on a human scale".

For this it quite simply needed to sever its traditional ties with the sacred. The avant-gardes of this century, with their exhibitions without pictures and their silent concerts, have taken the break as far as it will go. The only question is whether or not it will be possible, in the vacuum left by their demise, to recreate a shared world on the basis of a radical rejection of all transcendence. ■

■ ■ ■

The language of acacias
The acacia tree emits biochemical alarm signals when threatened, according to a report presented by South African zoologist Wouter van Hoven to an international conference at Montpellier (France) in September 1990. By producing ethylene, a colourless gas with a sweet odour, acacias warn one another of danger, as from a browsing animal. When nearby trees receive the signal transmitted by the ethylene in the air, their leaves fill with tannin, a substance found in many plants which may be toxic when eaten in large quantities.

■ ■ ■

Dublin's fair city
Dublin will be officially designated Cultural Capital of Europe 1991 at a ceremony in Dublin Castle next March. A full programme of cultural events is scheduled until October, including a meeting of leading European creative artists in June, a literary festival and international theatre events. The programme's strong literary flavour is not surprising, since Dublin is the birthplace of such noted writers as Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde and James Joyce, as well as three authors who have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature—W.B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw and Samuel Beckett.

■ ■ ■

Island of hope
The main building on Ellis Island, the immigration station in New York Harbor that was the United States' most famous port of entry, was dedicated as an immigration museum on 9 September 1990. Between 1892 and 1924, 12 million immigrants arrived on the island, mainly from Italy and Eastern Europe. Constructed between 1897 and 1900, this vast building with its great hall where processing took place and a "stair of separation" down which immigrants stepped to begin life in their new country, has undergone a 7-year restoration programme. Archival facilities are available to visitors and scholars in a library and reading room.

■ ■ ■

AIDS vaccine
A vaccine against AIDS will not be available within the next 10 years, although in 5 years' time there will be a range of drugs to prolong the lives of persons with AIDS, according to Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO). Speaking in New York in September, Mr. Nakajima said that AIDS is now the primary cause of infant mortality in many developing countries, especially in Central Africa. To combat other child diseases, WHO is contributing to an international initiative to develop a "children's vaccine" which will deliver many immunizing antigens in a single dose.

■ ■ ■

Great themes of humanity
The Italian publishing company Eldec is launching a monumental work entitled "The Great Themes of Humanity", on which a 50-strong team has been working for 10 years. The series consists of 20 300-page volumes on themes such as love, the unconscious, beauty, work, adventure, friendship, power, and dreams. Each volume includes a philosophical introduction to the theme, a study of its treatment in world literature, and a wide-ranging critical commentary. The illustrations are by 20 internationally known Italian artists, each of whom is responsible for one volume.

■ ■ ■

Popularizing science
Molecular biology and brain research are the two most often treated subjects in international scientific journals, according to John Maddox, editor of the British scientific weekly *Nature*, and Eugene Garfield, president of the United States Institute of Scientific Information. Both men note that the non-specialist press is playing an increasingly important role in the spread of scientific information, partly in response to growing public interest in scientific research.

■ ■ ■

Aid for the disabled
The robotics section of France's Commissariat for Atomic Energy has developed an aid for disabled people. Known by the acronym of "Master", the robot is an articulated arm equipped with a pincer-like hand. Computer-controlled and activated by voice or keyboard, it can execute a range of movements which are difficult or impossible for the disabled. The robot could be mass-produced and used to help disabled people at work.

■ ■ ■

Water and life
The International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, which ends in December 1990, has led to the provision of safe water supplies for 700 million people, but polluted water still causes the death of 35,000 people each day through diarrhoeal diseases. To further the aims of the Decade through the 1990s, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and WHO will continue their efforts to provide safe water and sanitation for the hundreds of millions of people who still have no access to these services.

■ ■ ■

Amnesty and children's rights
As a lead-up to the World Summit for Children which was held in New York in September, the human rights organization Amnesty International called on governments around the world to stop the illegal killing, torture and arbitrary imprisonment of children and to put an end to violations of their rights. According to Amnesty, children are victimized in many countries because they are seen as a "social or political threat".

■ ■ ■

Pyramid on Everest
Last summer a team of Italian scientists, technicians and mountaineers erected a glass and aluminium pyramid housing a laboratory at an altitude of 5,050 m on the slopes of Mount Everest. The 3-storey construction, which can accommodate up to 30 people, is being used for biological, medical, ecological and meteorological research.

■ ■ ■

Death by pollution
Each year 2,000 Europeans die from diseases caused by air pollution, according to a confidential study carried out by WHO on behalf of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. According to the study, millions of Europeans live in areas where air pollution has reached a level that puts health at risk. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are particularly affected.

■ ■ ■

Hospital of the future
A multidisciplinary international team from the American College of Healthcare Executives and Andersen Consulting has designed a fully computerized hospital of the future. All departments have instant access to patients' dossiers, thus avoiding errors and excessive paperwork while reducing costs. The prototype hospital, installed for three years at the Informart exhibition centre in Dallas, Texas, will act as a forum for education and research on better integration of new technology into medical care.

■ ■ ■

The Club of Rome
Ricardo Díez Hochleitner of Spain will succeed Alexander King as president of the Club of Rome in January 1991. The incoming president of this institution which aims to promote a better understanding of world problems has declared that "the work of the Club of Rome will continue to be guided by the conviction that the material and cultural enrichment of one part of the world cannot be sustained by the poverty and ignorance of the other part".

The magic of Lahore

by Chantal Lyard

WORLD

I saw Lahore, star of the Punjab, at night, and took its soul unawares. The birds were roosting in the shadow of the banyan trees. The pellucid notes of a sitar were heard, and suddenly a flute joined in.

According to the books, and to hearsay, Lahore is the most beautiful city in Pakistan. The Indus makes the plain of the Punjab gleam with its tributaries, which from earliest Antiquity have brought life and cultural riches with them. Here at this fertile crossroads Lahore was born and grew, to become a key administrative, religious and business centre.

Lahore lies on a secondary track of the Silk Road, and is watered by the river Ravi. It assumed its importance in the eleventh century, when it became the capital of the sultans of Rhazni. After a long period of turmoil, destruction and short-lived rulers it became in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries one of the great cities of Mogul India.

Babur, founder of the Mogul empire, made it a star of the first order: under the Mogul dynasty Lahore was adorned with buildings that now form a splendid legacy.

I walked to the moonlit red sandstone Fort. Founded, according to legend, by Prince Loth, son of Rama, it was rebuilt in the sixteenth century by Babur's descendant Akbar and embellished by his son Jahangir and his grandson Shah Jahan. The twenty or so buildings contained within its ramparts afford an excellent picture of the development of Mogul art over nearly two centuries. Audience chambers and mosques, princely apartments, royal baths and pavilions are disposed around gardens, terraces and ornamental ponds.

I dreamed awhile in the Naulakha, a small marble pavilion encrusted with semi-precious stones in floral and geometrical designs. I left the Fort by the Elephant Passage (Hathi Paer); and as I stood in front of the mosaics on the enclosure wall my imagination for a moment conjured up the festivities and pleasures of the court, the elephant and camel contests, and the polo games. Nowadays,

H E R I T A G E

in the dry moat, men in dazzlingly white cotton scythe the grass, as though to obliterate the passage of time.

I saw the sun rise over Lahore, and the rosy droplets in the dawn, when the faithful come home from prayers. I saw the sun light up the Shalimar Gardens—the famous "Garden of Love" laid out by Shah Jahan himself in 1642. He had a canal dug to bring water from the Ravi, to replenish the ponds and irrigate the orchards and beds of roses, cyclamen and iris.

The royal family would have come out on to the three terraces, with their slender marble and sandstone pavilions set amid the delights of the trees, and the music of the birds and fountains, in search of coolness and to be entertained with dances and concerts. At nocturnal festivities the light of camphor-scented candles would have given the cypresses, pomegranate trees and waterfalls mysterious shapes.

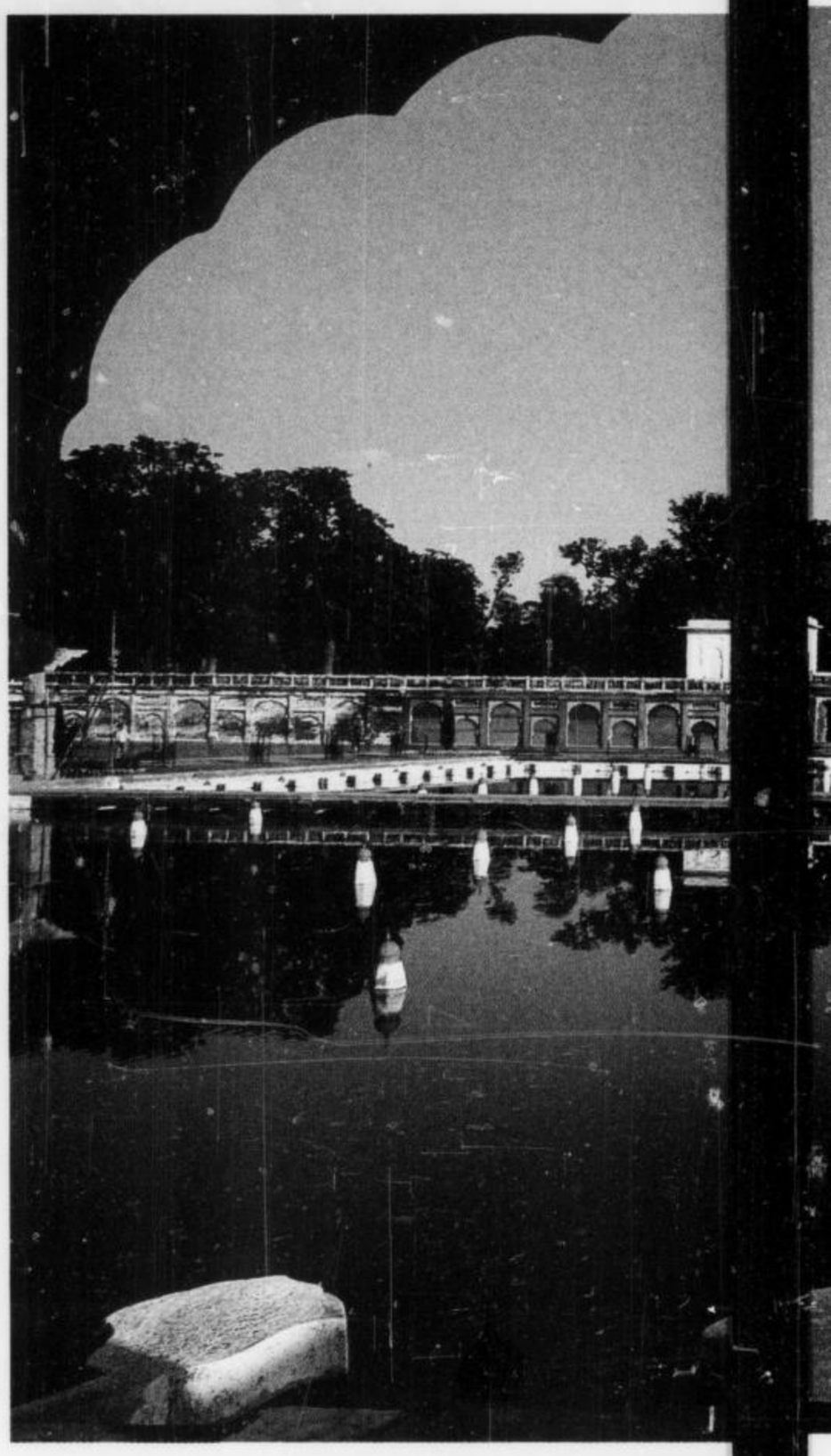
The following lines, carved in the stone beside a fountain, were once wrung from the sorrowing heart of Princess Zebun-Nisa, daughter of the emperor Aurangzeb:

"O waterfall, for love of whom shed'st thou thy tears?

Whom mournest thou? In whose memory hast thou furrowed thy brow?"

I saw Lahore unfolding to the light, its women clad in tulip- and mango-coloured fabrics. The men sweltered in the heat. In the Shahdara Garden I walked to Jahangir's tomb, erected by his son Shah Jahan, who also built the Taj Mahal at Agra, in India. An avenue of venerable banyans and huge fig-trees leads to the marble and sandstone mausoleum. On the enclosure wall a plethora of white marble ornament representing bowls of fruit, flowers and ewers is arranged in elegant mosaics.

To reach the heart of the monument I followed a passage decorated entirely with frescoes from wall to ceiling, and found myself in another world. The wind sighed through the cloisters of the cenotaph. All white marble, it bears sacred inscriptions in black marble—the ninety-nine attributes of the name of Allah. Around the plinth run floral mouldings in semi-precious stones—lapis lazuli, amethyst, agate and turquoise—



Right, the Shalimar Gardens (1641). Left, mosaic tile work in the mosque of Wazir Khan, Lahore (1634).

mined in the Karakorum Mountains. How gentle death seems, by the side of this tomb!

I heard the five calls to prayer ring out over Lahore. At the mosque of Wazir Khan, in the heart of the old city, I admired the brilliance of the paradise flowers in the splendid ceramic mosaics of this shrine built in the reign of Shah Jahan. At the Badshahi mosque with its daring marble domes, built likewise in the seventeenth century by Aurangzeb, the sun flooded the huge square courtyard in which 60,000 worshippers can pray at once. Its four minarets climb high into the sky like soaring birds.

I saw the burial-place of guru Arjan, fifth prophet of the Sikhs, and the Samadhi, tomb of the illustrious ruler Ranjit Singh—magnificent relics, with their fluted golden domes, of the period (1764-1849) when Lahore was the capital of the Sikh kingdom.

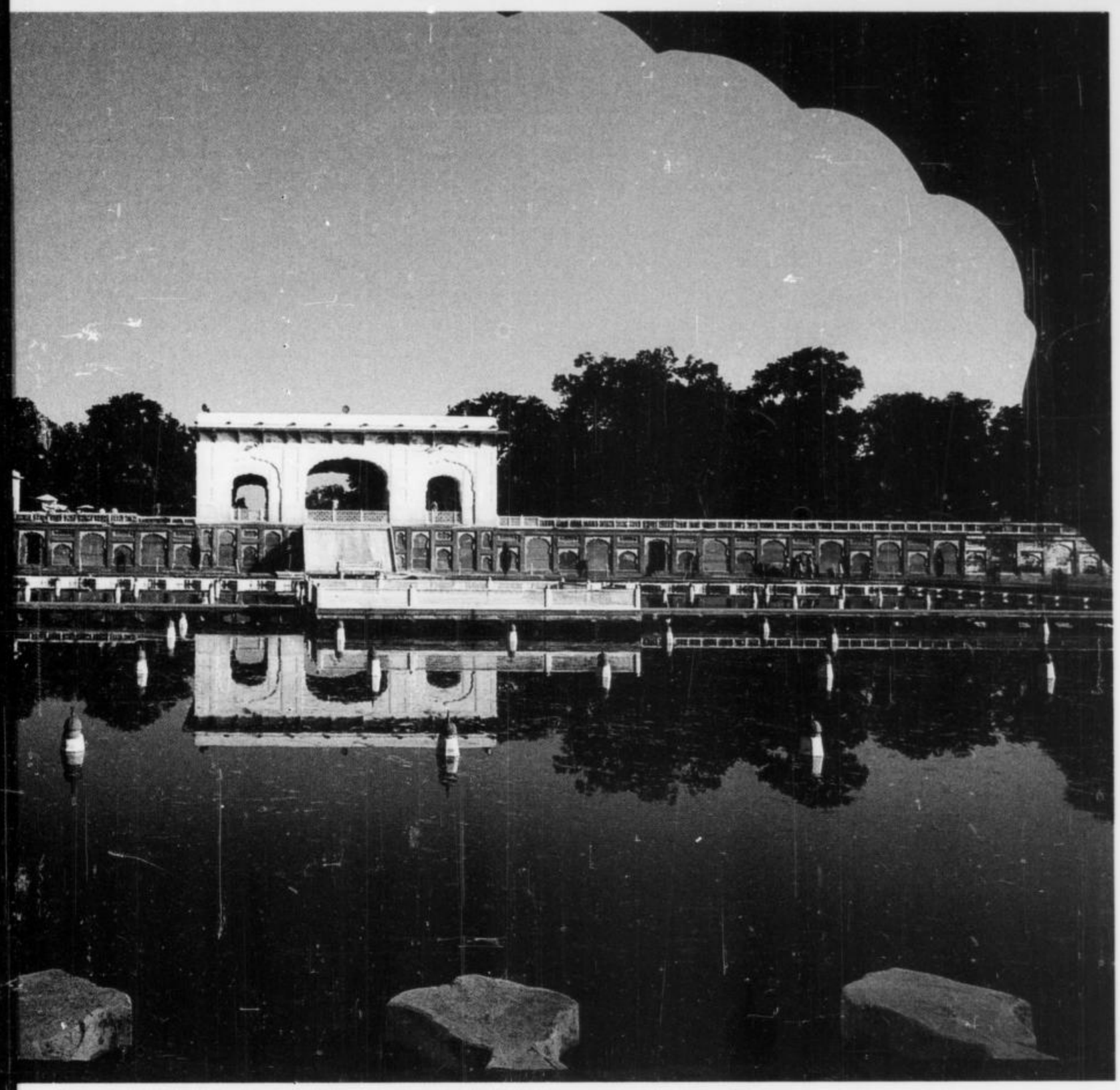
I saw Lahore in the middle of the day, when men surrender to sleep and a nightingale sings in the shade. I saw the peacocks displaying in the English parks, and breathed the heady scent of the frangipani trees. During the century of British rule (1849-1947), a university, cathedral and other public buildings were built in the composite style known as Mogul Gothic, and parks and broad tree-lined avenues were laid out. The first curator of the fine Lahore Museum, which contains *inter alia* a splendid collection of Mogul paintings, was Rudyard Kipling's father John Lockwood Kipling.

I left Lahore at the time of day when people weave garlands of roses, zinnias and marigolds for the dead. Just before daybreak I betook myself to the poet's tomb, cooled my hands and forehead at a nearby fountain, and murmured to myself these lines by Mohammad Iqbal:

"I would not let my heart become attached to this garden:

I went my way, free of all ties." ■

CHANTAL LYARD,
French Sinologist, poet and essayist, is a member of Unesco's cultural heritage division where she is concerned with the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.



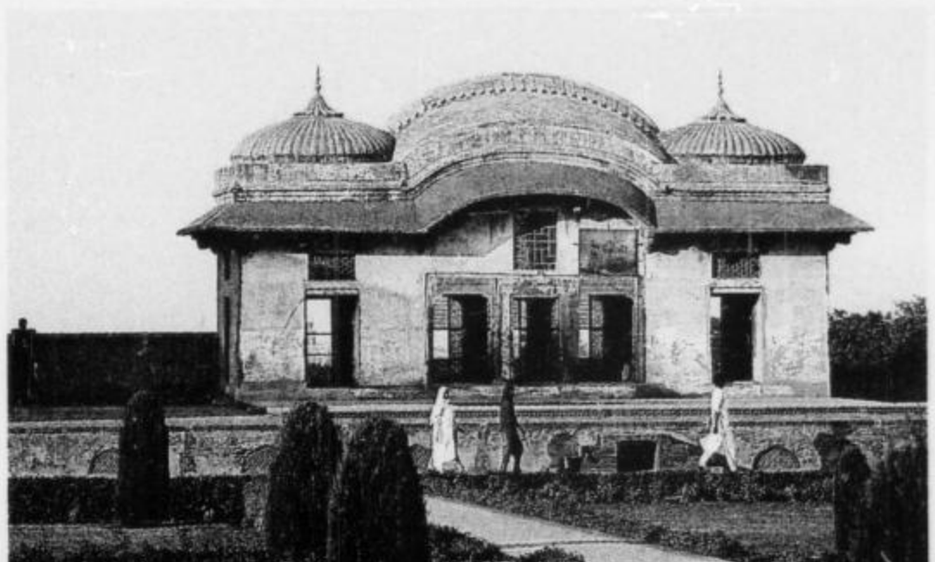
With Unesco assistance, a vast rescue operation

The Fort and Shalimar Gardens at Lahore, Pakistan, were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1981, shortly after they had been seriously damaged by torrential rainfall.

With Unesco assistance, the Pakistan authorities embarked on a restoration programme. In many of the buildings crumbling cement has been replaced by concrete reinforced with layers of a mixture of bitumen and polythene. Roofs have been covered with jointed tiles and made more waterproof. Cement has been pumped into fissures in roofs and walls, and a coat of plaster has brought harmony to the façades.

Five other sites in Pakistan are inscribed on the World Heritage List: the archaeological ruins at Moenjodaro (which are the subject of a long-term international safeguarding campaign), Taxila, the Buddhist ruins of Takht-i-Bahi and the nearby city remains at Sahr-i-Bahlol, and the historic monuments of Thatta.

Pavilion on the ramparts of the Lahore Fort.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In defence of freedom

I have been a subscriber to the *Unesco Courier* for some time. Your publication is of very high quality, and reflects extremely well on Unesco and its mission.

I write to express particular pleasure in having received the September issue in which there are many articles dealing with the role of a free press. I hope that the articles contained in this issue will be read widely in the many countries and many languages served by Unesco. You have done a great service for the institution and a great service for the media.

I wish you continued success in the future.

W. Terry Maguire
Senior Vice President,
American Newspaper Publishers Association
Washington, D.C.

Spelling it out

The pronunciation of the names of people and places is bound to create problems for the readers of a magazine published in 35 languages. I suggest that you add the transcriptions of proper nouns into the International Phonetic Alphabet, either in brackets in the text or at the end of each article or issue. You might even consider publishing a glossary as an occasional supplement. Secondly, could you tell me where I can obtain titles from the "Archives Collection" mentioned in your May 1989 issue on *Modern Manuscripts*?

Luis Aprigio dos Anjos
Jurubim (Pernambuco, Brazil)

Your idea is very interesting, but don't you think that adding lots of phonetic transcriptions to each article would make the magazine harder to read? We don't always have enough space for a glossary, but we do add explanatory footnotes where we feel it is necessary. The different language editions of the Courier transcribe proper nouns into their own languages.

The "Archives Collection" is co-published in Brazil by the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq), Avenida W3, Norte quadra 507, Brasilia DF CEP 70740. The books can also be obtained from the Institute of Brazilian Studies, Faculty of Letters, University of São Paulo, Cidade Universitaria, CP 8191, São Paulo SP, Brazil. Editor

Homage to Hans Selye

A plaque to the memory of the Austrian-born Canadian physiologist Hans Selye (1907-1982) is to be unveiled at Montreal in October 1992 by the Canadian government and the United States National Institute of Health, in the presence of Nobel laureates in physiology and medicine. Professor Selye's work on stress, distress and problems of adaptation to the modern world saved millions of lives. He was described by Albert Einstein as the father of the general theory of physiology and medicine. A member of the learned societies of many countries and the author of over 60 bestselling science books, he was also a philosopher, poet, sociologist and humanist. I would like to propose that you devote a special issue of your magazine to this genius of our time. An appropriate cover illustration would be Salvador Dalí's work entitled *Stress*, which was created for Hans Selye.

Dr. I.S. Khorol
Moscow (USSR)

Rapid reading

The author of the article entitled "The PC and the 3 Rs" published in your July 1990 issue on world literacy states that although forecasts of the decline of "book cultures" have often been made in the last fifty years, the market for conventionally published works has held up in the face of ostensibly rival media (recorded music, television, video).

This is understandable since much more information can be assimilated by reading than by listening to cassettes or radio, or by watching television. It is possible to listen to an average of 9,000 words per hour, and to read 27,000 words. Rapid readers can absorb some 160,000 words per hour, more if they are particularly gifted. This enormous difference explains the superiority of books and other written works to audio-visual material.

Sylvie Massenet
Villebon-sur-Yvette (France)

An Esperanto *Courier*?

In the Letters page of your July 1990 issue, three readers petition for an Esperanto edition of the *Unesco Courier*. As a supporter of Esperanto I share their point of view, but wonder if such a project is feasible at the present time. Esperantists have many publications at their disposal, and some of them would be unable to afford a subscription to your magazine because of the political and economic situation in their countries. One research organization which uses Esperanto as a principal working language, the International Academy of Sciences in San Marino, has even set up a foundation, the Dr. Klemm-Fonduseto, to cover the nominal subscription fees of some of its members. Perhaps it would be more realistic to launch an "Esperanto column" in the *Courier*, or to publish a special issue, annually at first, to gauge readers' reactions?

Germain Pirlot
Ostend (Belgium)

No smoke without fire

You have yielded to criticism (Letters page, September 1990) from a member of a non-smoking association regarding a postage stamp with a picture of a Danish actress holding a cigarette—as if this was a public scandal or an affront to humanity!

I deeply regret the growing hostility towards smokers. The use of tobacco is not necessarily a weakness or a vice, any more than the consumption of wine and spirits. There is a difference between those who use tobacco and those who abuse it. To treat them all alike implies a lack of tolerance and respect towards the first group and may cause offence to pipe and cigar smokers' associations. I speak as a non-smoker.

Raymond Debierre
Onesse-Laharie (France)

Soviet-American magazine

Where can I obtain the Soviet-American quarterly mentioned on the "In brief..." page of the July 1990 issue of the *Courier*?

Guillaume Sapriel
Paris (France)

To take out a subscription to Quantum *magazine, write to Mr. Bill G. Aldridge, Executive Director, National Science Teachers Association, 1742 Connecticut Avenue, NW Washington, D.C. 20009, United States.* Editor

Agri-culture

I would like to suggest that you publish an issue or a feature on the close relationship which once existed, and still does among certain peoples, between agriculture and culture. The world's growing numbers of city-dwellers are becoming more and more cut off from the natural rhythms of life. The gravity of certain environmental problems today is leading us to rediscover the wisdom of those cultures which have maintained their links with the natural world.

P. Jamet
Argenteuil (France)

Making contact

I think it is essential that regular readers of the *Courier*, like myself, should be able to write to one another and express our differences of opinion in a friendly and constructive way. Why don't you give the full addresses of readers whose letters you publish? If you did, the magazine could act as a bridge between people of different cultures, races, languages, religions and social backgrounds, who have interests in common.

Humberto de O. Madeira
Treinta y tres No. 197
Salto (Uruguay)

We would be pleased to publish readers' full addresses if they indicate that they so wish. Editor

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